

1 of 1 DOCUMENT

Ottawa Citizen

May 4, 2002 Saturday Final Edition

**The untold story of Hasanville's shadowy past: (Part 1): A group of Muslims in the Ottawa Valley blames 'prejudice' for the suspicions that surround them. But their commune, inspired by a terrorist sheik from Pakistan, was connected to a 1991 plot to bomb two Hindu sites in Toronto. Lee Berthiaume reports.**

**SOURCE:** The Ottawa Citizen

**BYLINE:** Lee Berthiaume

**SECTION:** Saturday Observer; Pg. B1

**LENGTH:** 4064 words

Acloistered Islamic community west of Ottawa, whose plans to build a mosque recently sparked an uproar among its neighbours, was inspired by a violent Pakistani sheik in the 1980s and was embroiled in a sensational criminal case in the early 1990s over a plot to blow up a Hindu temple near Toronto.

Largely hidden from view by tall stands of pine and spruce, the Muslim enclave consists of a half-dozen mobile homes and is marked by a rainbow-coloured sign that says "**Welcome to Hasanville.**" But a guard hut and gated entrance send a less inviting message to visitors.

The community, located just outside the hamlet of Combermere about 15 kilometres south of Barry's Bay, was started in 1990. That's when a small, Toronto-based group of Muslim converts -- mostly black immigrants from the United States and the Caribbean -- purchased the 120-hectare property not far from Algonquin Park as a rustic religious retreat from the city.

Two of the founders of Hasanville are also directors of a newly formed corporation, Muslims of the Americas Al Madrasah-lul Islamia, which is building the mosque. Residents in surrounding towns have expressed concerns about the project, wondering why a mosque planned for hundreds of worshippers would be built at an isolated site that has never housed more than a dozen families.

Questions have also been raised about the connection between this Muslim community and the U.S.-based Muslims of the Americas network that operates almost identical rural compounds in the States. Muslims of the Americas is widely viewed by U.S. and Canadian law enforcement agencies as a thinly disguised front for Jamaat al-Fuqra -- a militant, Pakistani-based Islamic organization with a history of violence in North America.

Six of the group's American compounds have come under renewed scrutiny since the September terrorist attacks on New York and Washington, and investigators believe some U.S. members of Muslims of the Americas have travelled to Pakistan for paramilitary training.

Hasanville's chief spokesman, Mohammed Jilany, has blamed "prejudice" for the suspicions surrounding the Combermere community. He has denied any formal links between Hasanville and Jamaat al-Fuqra or Muslims of the Americas. He insists the only goals of the community are peaceful ones: the establishment of a mosque, a religious education program and a communal farming operation.

The untold story of Hasanville's shadowy past: (Part 1): A group of Muslims in the Ottawa Valley blames 'prejudice' for the suspicions that surround them. But their commune, inspired by a terrorist sheik from Pakistan, was connected to a 1991 plot to bomb two Hindu sites in Toronto. Lee Berthiaume reports. Ottawa Citizen May 4, 2002 Saturday Final Edition

The 30-odd men, women and children of Hasanville "couldn't survive in the city. So they've gone to the poor area to survive in a trailer. What is there to write about?" Mr. Jilany has told the Citizen. "There is nothing hidden."

Indeed, there is no indication of any illegal activity at Hasanville today, and police in the area say the residents of the community have conducted themselves as peaceful, law-abiding citizens. But dating back to its origins in the late 1980s, Hasanville has a darker history.

Central to that history is a shadowy Pakistani cleric, Sheik Mubarik Ali Gilani, who has a long track record for inciting Islamic terrorism in North America. He also has an apparent connection to one of the most disturbing aftershocks in the post-9/11 world: the December plot by alleged "shoe bomber" Richard Reid to bring down yet another jetliner.

Earlier this year, Sheik Gilani also became a key figure in the investigation into the death of American journalist Daniel Pearl, who disappeared in Pakistan after attempting to set up a meeting with Mr. Gilani to discuss Mr. Reid's alleged ties to al-Fuqra.

Hasanville -- like Jamaat al-Fuqra and Muslims of the Americas -- is, in fact, a direct offspring of Sheik Gilani's global push for a purified Islam. And, more startling, key members of the community were at the centre of a terrorist plot 11 years ago to bomb an Indian movie theatre in Toronto and a Hindu temple in nearby Richmond Hill.

It was a case that -- a full decade before the world-shaking events of Sept. 11, 2001 -- awakened many Canadians to the fact that North America had become a staging ground for Islamic extremists. Had the bomb plot been carried out, hundreds or even thousands of Hindus in this country might have died as proxy victims in the struggle between India and Pakistan over Kashmir. Toronto, not New York, would have become the original Ground Zero of international terrorism.

Hasanville seems a world away from the front lines of Islamic jihad, and then some. It's a quiet co-op community that appears, above all, to draw its inspiration from the Ottawa Valley's rural pioneers and the back-to-the-land movement of the 1960s. But it's also clear that Hasanville's roots reach deeply into the hard-packed soil of Muslim fundamentalism.

- - -

A few months ago, a Citizen reporter who went to Hasanville was met at the gate by a tall, slender black man in his early 50s who identified himself as Glen. He offered little information and launched a scathing attack on the media before sending the visitor away.

The man was Glen Neville Ford, a Trinidadian native who immigrated to Canada in the mid-1970s, converted to Islam and by 1982 had become the Toronto leader of a puritanical branch of the religion known as Jamaat al-Fuqra.

Translated as "community of the impoverished" or "army of the poor," the sect was created and led by Sheik Gilani, the hardline Pakistani cleric who had made it his mission to rally worldwide support for Afghani Muslims in their war against the Soviet Union and for Kashmiri Muslims in their struggle for independence from India.

Sheik Gilani also preached strict adherence to Islamic law, denounced the West in general and Jews in particular, and urged his followers -- mostly black Muslims in Canada, the U.S. and the West Indies -- to set up rural retreats to insulate themselves against the sinful influences of urban life.

During the 1980s, Mr. Ford was one of Sheik Gilani's key Canadian disciples, operating in relative obscurity as he gathered a small group of Toronto adherents and served as their "amir," or leader. In 1989, a member of the group noticed a real estate ad placed by Combermere lumberman Robert Yaskolskie, and a deal was soon struck to purchase the land that would become Hasanville for about \$100,000.

It was in the early 1990s when Mr. Ford was thrust into an unpleasant spotlight and, presumably, gained his fill of journalists. That's when he was arrested and put on trial in the most sensational case of alleged terrorism in Canadian history.

The untold story of Hasanville's shadowy past: (Part 1): A group of Muslims in the Ottawa Valley blames 'prejudice' for the suspicions that surround them. But their commune, inspired by a terrorist sheik from Pakistan, was connected to a 1991 plot to bomb two Hindu sites in Toronto. Lee Berthiaume reports. Ottawa Citizen May 4, 2002 Saturday Final Edition

He had been accused of conspiring with five other Muslim men to target Toronto's Hindu community by bombing the India Theatre on Gerrard Street and the Vishnu Temple in suburban Richmond Hill.

The plot unravelled at the Niagara Falls border crossing in the early evening of Oct. 3, 1991. Mr. Ford was at the wheel of a Buick Skylark, heading over the Rainbow Bridge en route to New York from Toronto, when he was waved to the side by U.S. customs officers. In the passenger seat was his close friend Tyrone Cole, a fellow Trinidadian and convert to Islam who had been helping Mr. Ford establish the rural retreat in Combermere.

A few hours earlier, a Chevrolet Suburban carrying two other friends -- Robert Wesley and Caba Jose Harris -- had also been pulled over for inspection. Border guards had come across a letter with the phrase "Dying as a soldier of Allah" and were now conducting an exhaustive search of the truck.

During the next five hours, hundreds of documents and pictures were pulled out of the two vehicles and examined as the four men were questioned by security agents. Among the material were floorplans of the Hindu temple and cinema, instructions for making explosives, surveillance videos of the two sites and diagrams detailing what appeared to be plans for a terrorist strike geared to maximize human carnage.

The Rainbow Bridge would be the end of the line for the four men. They were arrested and turned over to Canadian authorities. Days later, police raided a house in Toronto and arrested Khidr Ali in connection with the alleged bomb plot. Then they issued a Canada-wide warrant for the group's apparent ringleader, Max Lon Fongenie, another Trinidadian native who shared Mr. Ford's fundamentalist approach to Islam and had been working closely with him as a co-founder of Hasanville.

At the same time, police traced the owner of the car that Mr. Ford had been driving to an apartment in Brooklyn, New York. There, police found two rifles, seven handguns and 2,000 rounds of ammunition, which they believed were to have been used in the Toronto attack.

Mr. Ford and Mr. Ali would spend the next two years in jail awaiting trial, and were eventually acquitted. But Mr. Cole, Mr. Wesley and Mr. Harris -- each of whom had spent time at Hasanville in the summer of 1991 -- were found guilty, and are still serving prison sentences for their roles in the conspiracy.

Mr. Fongenie apparently fled to Pakistan after the arrests in 1991 and remains a wanted man.

The 1993 trial, which left a murky impression of the exact nature of the Toronto plot, would nevertheless offer a clear picture of the origins of the Muslim community at Combermere and the influence of Sheik Gilani -- whose radical teachings served as the inspiration for al-Fuqra, Muslims of the Americas and Hasanville itself.

---

On Oct. 10, 1993, a scene unique in the history of Canadian justice unfolded at a provincial courthouse in St. Catharines. The trial for the five men charged in the Toronto bomb plot was finally set to begin after two years of evidence gathering and months of delays caused by concerns about security arrangements.

The case had been moved from Toronto to the smaller venue in St. Catharines to make it easier for police to protect the participants from a feared attack by supporters -- or opponents -- of the defendants.

Each day throughout the nine-week trial, Mr. Ford and the four other accused were taken to and from the courthouse in an armed vehicle surrounded by a police convoy. Chained together at the wrist and ankle, the men were escorted into the building under close guard. A SWAT team patrolled the courthouse grounds and snipers, poised on rooftop perches, scanned the streets for suspicious activity.

Canadians had never seen anything like it. The extraordinary security precautions were prompted, in part, by an incident that had occurred in New York City in February 1993. Powerful bombs had exploded in a parking garage of the World Trade Centre, killing six people and injuring more than 1,000.

If the Toronto bomb plot had, at first, seemed too far-fetched to believe, the successful terrorist strike at the heart of the American financial system had dramatically underscored the fact that some Islamic militants were determined to bring their grievances against the West to North American soil.

The fact that a follower of Sheik Gilani was a key suspect in the World Trade Centre bombing drew a host of American reporters to St. Catharines and

The untold story of Hasaville's shadowy past: (Part 1): A group of Muslims in the Ottawa Valley blames 'prejudice' for the suspicions that surround them. But their commune, inspired by a terrorist sheik from Pakistan, was connected to a 1991 plot to bomb two Hindu sites in Toronto. Lee Berthiaume reports. Ottawa Citizen May 4, 2002 Saturday Final Edition

fuelled police fears that the trial of an al-Fuqra amir from Toronto -- Glen Ford -- might spark trouble at the courthouse.

By 1993, Sheik Gilani's influence had been felt across North America for more than a decade. In the United States, Jamaat al-Fuqra had been attracting thousands of followers and had already established a host of rural compounds -- in California, Texas, Colorado, New York -- mostly operating under the name Muslims of the Americas.

Promoted as religious retreats for black Muslim converts, the communes recruited members from impoverished inner-city neighbourhoods and even prisons. In each case, the community was located in an isolated setting with a sign welcoming visitors as well as an iron gate and guard hut at the entrance. Mobile homes provided shelter. Occasionally there was a mosque.

But as new communities appeared and some of the old ones closed, Muslims of the Americas/Jamaat al-Fuqra increasingly came under the scrutiny of U.S. law enforcement agencies.

Residents of the villages would eventually become suspects in at least 10 unsolved assassinations and 17 firebombings between 1979 and 1990, according to the U.S. government.

One of the most disturbing cases -- prior to the discovery of the Toronto bomb plot -- began with a discovery by Colorado police in 1989. A storage locker being rented by al-Fuqra members in Colorado Springs was raided and revealed a stockpile of weapons, components for pipe bombs and about 30 pounds of explosives. There were also firing-range targets with phrases such as "FBI Anti-Terrorist Team" and "Zionist Pig" stencilled on them.

The locker was filled with other suspicious documents, one of which included detailed plans for the murder of a Muslim cleric in Tucson, Arizona, who had preached that the Koran was written by man, not God.

Despite warnings that he was an al-Fuqra target, Imam Rashid Khalifa was stabbed to death inside his Tucson mosque in January 1990 in a killing that perfectly matched the plan seized by police a few months earlier.

Two men, who were eventually arrested while living at Muslims of the Americas compounds in South Carolina and Virginia, were convicted of conspiracy to commit murder.

The 1984 triple-murder of three East Indian men in Tacoma, Washington, is also believed to have been the work of al-Fuqra members.

Other al-Fuqra members had been convicted of gun-smuggling, fraud and firebombings of a Hare Krishna temple in Denver and various Hindu sites in Seattle and Portland, Oregon. Stephen Paster, a man convicted in one of those bombings and suspected in two others, is now believed to be living in Lahore, Pakistan, where U.S. authorities say he helps train al-Fuqra members in the use of explosives.

---

When Glen Ford took the stand on Nov. 29, 1993, he made no attempt to deny his links with Sheik Gilani, Jamaat al-Fuqra or Muslims of the Americas. In fact, he acknowledged that he had twice travelled to Lahore to study at the sheik's Qur'anic Open University, described by Mr. Ford as "an educational wing" of Muslims of the Americas -- but by the FBI as a front for terrorist training.

He said he had also encouraged Canadian members of the jamaat to send money to Sheik Gilani in Pakistan.

But Mr. Ford insisted that he and the other accused men had been arrested as the result of a huge misunderstanding. He claimed they had only been making an instructional video -- built around the fictional bombing of the two Hindu sites in Toronto -- to be sent to Pakistan to help train Kashmiri Muslim fighters in their defence against raids by Indian government security forces.

The account was presented by defence lawyers as a credible explanation of what had happened and attacked by Crown attorneys as a smokescreen to disguise a terrorist plot.

The untold story of Hasanville's shadowy past: (Part 1): A group of Muslims in the Ottawa Valley blames 'prejudice' for the suspicions that surround them. But their commune, inspired by a terrorist sheik from Pakistan, was connected to a 1991 plot to bomb two Hindu sites in Toronto. Lee Berthiaume reports. Ottawa Citizen May 4, 2002 Saturday Final Edition

Mr. Ford's lawyer, Ahmad Baksh, expressed concern that his client's association with Sheik Gilani might be enough by itself to convince jurors to convict him of a crime he didn't commit.

"The whole idea that is being projected about Mr. Ford is that he is a person who would do damage because of an ideological motive, because of his ties with Mr. Gilani," Mr. Baksh said during the trial. "That's what it boils down to in essence."

The defence strategy was to present evidence of Mr. Ford's peaceful activities as a fundraiser, lobbyist and spiritual leader -- albeit frequently in support of Sheik Gilani and the Kashmiri cause -- to counter any suggestion of violence in his past.

One of the effects of the strategy was that Mr. Ford's testimony provided a rare, free-flowing description of Jamaat al-Fuqra's evolution into Muslims of the Americas and the essential indistinguishability of those two entities. The testimony also gave a clear sense of how the sheik's teachings had provided the vision for Hasanville.

It emerged during the trial that Mr. Ford and Mr. Cole had been friends since before they left Trinidad, and that the two converted to Islam within days of each other in 1976. In 1981, they joined Dar Ul Islam, an organization for black Muslims with chapters across North America.

During a trip to the U.S. and Canada in 1980, Sheik Gilani made a concerted effort to bring black Muslims into his fold and raise their attention to the struggles in Afghanistan and Kashmir.

When a group of Muslims from Pakistan appealed to the Dar Ul Islam in Toronto to help raise funds for the fighting in Afghanistan, the Toronto group switched its name to Jamaat al-Fuqra and its focus to the politics of Central Asia.

"Up to that time, we were kind of tribal," Mr. Ford said at the trial. "We were all black folks so we were all kind of into a black thing. When these representatives from Pakistan came, it decided to stick."

Mr. Ford said that in late 1983, he became one of two amirs for the Toronto al-Fuqra group. The other was Mr. Fongenie.

As amirs, the two men were in charge of the group's spiritual development. They also organized political demonstrations, letter-writing campaigns, and community events to assist their Muslim brothers and sisters around the world.

"I'm a Muslim right. Just a Muslim. Just like any of you I try to live clean and good and I am involved in the Kashmiri Muslim, against what is taking place there," Mr. Ford testified. "My help is to raise funds. I have lobbied. I have marched on city hall. I have marched in Washington. We have sent letters."

The Toronto group also began working toward a goal Sheik Gilani had set for all of his North American followers: to establish residential havens in the countryside to begin "purifying" their communities. The idea, Mr. Ford testified, was to escape the "destructive" forces of the city and to "live in that mode of simplicity and purity."

Around the same time, the Toronto al-Fuqra group underwent another identify makeover.

"When I became the amir, the name was changed to Muslims of the Americas," said Mr. Ford. "I think the reason was based on how Jamaat functioned in Canada, America, South America. They said al-Fuqra was too much like a mystic name. To identify with areas of work we said Muslims of the Americas would be appropriate."

As Mr. Ford described it, the effort to establish Hasanville was led by himself and Mr. Fongenie. And some progress was being made on the project between the time the property was purchased in 1990 and the arrests at Niagara Falls in October 1991.

Members of the Toronto group had started to move into the Combermere area. Many of them rented apartments in the hamlet and worked on improving the jamaat's nearby property. Adults worked in Toronto from Monday to Friday, returning to their families to spend the weekend at Hasanville.

The untold story of Hasanville's shadowy past: (Part 1): A group of Muslims in the Ottawa Valley blames 'prejudice' for the suspicions that surround them. But their commune, inspired by a terrorist sheik from Pakistan, was connected to a 1991 plot to bomb two Hindu sites in Toronto. Lee Berthiaume reports. Ottawa Citizen May 4, 2002 Saturday Final Edition

"At that time we were quite small, like maybe two or three or four families," said Mr. Ford. "More people began to embrace Islam. We began to build."

In the summer of 1991, Mr. Cole, Mr. Wesley and Mr. Harris all visited the Combermere community. Mr. Cole and Mr. Wesley had been living "on the land," as Mr. Ford described it, in Texas. And Mr. Cole advised his Canadian friends on how to get things moving at their site.

"It's amazing," Mr. Ford said of Mr. Cole's advice. "When he came and he went up to our land, I had been there for one year and when he saw our property, he said, 'Listen, you have some barns. Why are you paying rent still? You're so near. Just transform the barns into homes.' "

Mr. Cole also served the community as an arbitrator of disputes, Mr. Ford said.

He testified that there were no weapons and no explosives at Hasanville, and that there was nothing illegal going on in the community. It was simply a place, he said, to reconnect with the land and inculcate the spiritual values espoused by Sheik Gilani, "my sheik."

At about the same time Mr. Ford was testifying in St. Catharines, Sheik Gilani was in Lahore denying the existence of Jamaat al-Fuqra in an interview with CBC investigative reporter Linden MacIntyre.

"You will not find a single person in Pakistan, single person in Sudan, and single person in America who can say there is something like Jamaat al-Fuqra," Sheik Gilani told the CBC. "I never founded any organization like that."

Asked if he knew any of the men on trial in Canada, the sheik said: "No, no, but I do know that one or two of them did come to Pakistan and they attended Islamic University there. And they went back to propagate Islam."

Referring to the charges against the five, he added: "This is all lies. All lies. I know what happened. I mean these just have some notebooks and sketches on that. They are going to do this and that. None, they would never done it. Never."

But there was other testimony at the trial that linked the men and Hasanville to more suspicious activity. In September 1991, Mr. Cole, Mr. Wesley and Mr. Fongenie spent two days in Combermere discussing, among other things, the situation in Kashmir.

Mr. Fongenie had recently come back to Canada from a visit to Pakistan. He returned equipped with a documentary video starring Sheik Gilani -- Soldiers of Allah -- and a determination to do something to contribute to the Muslim struggle against the Hindus.

In the video, the sheik was shown in military dress boasting about how his "university" had successfully trained North Americans to serve as guerrilla fighters in Kashmir.

"In Combermere," Mr. Wesley testified, "we discussed the situation and he (Mr. Fongenie) decided that he wanted to do a video ... so they (Kashmiri Muslims) could be pre-warned when something was going to occur and they could at that time do different things to, like defend themselves, whatever."

Mr. Wesley described how he later disguised himself and gained permission to take pictures inside the Vishnu Temple by pretending that his wife was an architect overseas but would be interested in the building's construction.

He said he conducted "surveillance" at the sites for the video project and that Mr. Fongenie was drafting plans for a "simulated infiltration" of the temple and the movie theatre.

A book seized by police, Mohammedan Revelations, contained a passage attributed to Sheik Gilani: "The mission of this Jamaat al-Fuqra is to lead Muslims to their final victory over Communists, Zionists, Hindus (and) deviators."

Prosecutors argued the Combermere meeting was, in fact, where the plot was hatched and that subsequent visits to the Toronto sites were preparation for deadly attacks.

The untold story of Hasanville's shadowy past: (Part 1): A group of Muslims in the Ottawa Valley blames 'prejudice' for the suspicions that surround them. But their commune, inspired by a terrorist sheik from Pakistan, was connected to a 1991 plot to bomb two Hindu sites in Toronto. Lee Berthiaume reports. Ottawa Citizen May 4, 2002 Saturday Final Edition

When Mr. Ford referred in his testimony to the "documentary" being prepared by his friends, a lawyer cross-examining him challenged the story: "I'm looking through all these documents, sir, and I don't see anything here about a simulated movie. All I see is lists of hit teams and guard teams."

Mr. Ford replied: "All you see is what you want to see. We leave this jury to see what they see."

Assistant Crown Attorney Philip Enright, lead prosecutor in the case, described the accused men as "cold-blooded, calculating and callous" Muslim extremists bent on carrying out a "sinister plot."

His closing argument noted that the Vishnu Temple could seat 4,000 worshippers and that "hundreds, if not thousands" of people could have been killed by strategically placed bombs.

He also drew special attention to one of the seized documents that stated "the location of the temple will allow for total focus on the Hindus without any other partys (sic) being involved in the fallout. ... If there are other than Hindu in the temple, then it would be fair to assess them as friends and no need for concern."

On Dec. 21, 1993, after a week of deliberations, the jury convicted Mr. Wesley, Mr. Cole and Mr. Harris of conspiring to commit mischief endangering life. The jury was unable to agree on a verdict against the three on charges of conspiring to commit murder. Mr. Ford and Mr. Ali were found not guilty on all counts. Mr. Fongenie, despite the world-wide arrest warrant, was never apprehended.

Four months later, when the three men convicted in the case were each sentenced to 12 years in prison, Ontario Court Justice Stephen Glithero bluntly described the trio as "de facto members of a terrorist movement" whose plot was "motivated by racial or religious intolerance for Hindus ... Your actions are despicable and represent a challenge to the very fabric of our society."

(Continued on next page)

**LOAD-DATE:** May 4, 2002

**LANGUAGE:** ENGLISH

**GRAPHIC:** Colour Photo: Bruno Schlumberger, The Ottawa Citizen; (Hasanville a Muslim commune near Barry's Bay.); Colour Photo: Sheik Mubarik Ali Gilani, the Pakistani cleric deemed a terrorist by the U.S., was recently linked to 'shoe bomber' Richard Reid. Sheik Gilani was the inspiration for Hasanville a Muslim commune near Barry's Bay.; Photo: Erin Riley, The Ottawa Citizen; The Vishnu Mandir Temple in Richmond Hill, above, and the India Theatre in Toronto were the focus of a bombing plot in 1991.; Photo: Glen Ford founded Hasanville in 1990 and still has a home there. He was charged in the Toronto bomb plot but acquitted in 1993.; Photo: Khidr Ali, a member of the Toronto 'jamaat' headed by Glen Ford, was tried in connection with the bomb plot but acquitted in 1993.; Photo: Prosecutors said Robert Wesley attended a meeting at Hasanville where the Toronto bomb plot was hatched. He is serving 12 years.; Photo: Caba Jose Harris, convicted in the plan to bomb two Hindu sites in Toronto, is serving 12 years in jail and faces deportation next year.; Photo: Max Lon Fongenie, whose family lives at the Hasanville commune he helped create, fled to Pakistan in 1991 and remains a fugitive.; Photo: Tyrone Cole, who helped launch Hasanville and whose son is a resident, is serving 12 years for his part in the Toronto bomb plot.; Graphic;Diagram: The Ottawa Citizen; (See hard copy for graphic).

**TYPE:** Feature; Crime