

LOCAL MUSLIMS EXPRESS WORRY ABOUT RELATIVES

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As bombs fell Sunday on targets in Afghanistan, local Muslims worried about relatives in neighboring countries, as well as innocent lives that may be lost in the war against terrorism.

"The Islamic community in America expressed its concern about innocent loss of life in New York, Virginia and Pennsylvania," said Dr. Raheel Khan, an American citizen born in Pakistan. "The same concern exists for loss of innocent life in Afghani-stan and the rest of the world."

Khan said America should retaliate in some way for the Sept. 11 attacks. How America responds is very important, he said.

"This cannot go unanswered," Khan said. "The cooler minds, they want to have a very precise retaliatory action to take out the Taliban and the bin Laden group. This is not unique to the Muslim community; many other Americans share that concern," he said.

"The majority of Afghans are not siding with bin Laden. Any extensive military action is bound to have an effect on innocent life as well."

Riverside High School teacher Parween Qazi has relatives who live in Pakistan, close to the border with Afghanistan. She said a flood of Afghan refugees is already straining Pakistan's economy.

"Every town in Pakistan, so many refugees are living in tents," she said. "This is one of the causes of the deteriorating economy, because they will work for less money. The Pakistani people cannot get jobs."

As many as 1.5 million Afghans, already weakened by years of drought and civil war, could seek food and refuge in Pakistan, Iran, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan in the coming months, the United Nations estimates.

"I don't think Pakistan can afford anymore refugees," Qazi said. "We hope that Congress will pass laws to give more money to Pakistan so they can keep them."

Qazi said Pakistanis also were the victims of terrorism within their own country, and worried about more bombings there.

Khan's parents and in-laws still live in Pakistan, and he is worried about planned anti-American demonstrations there. The attacks may destabilize governments in the region like Pakistan's, he said.

Pakistan shares a long and porous border with Afghani-stan, and members of the Pashtun ethnic group live on both sides.

"I think everything is up in the air. It depends on the extent of the destruction in Afghanistan. It may leave the country very unstable," he said.

Khan supports President Bush's decision to drop food and medical supplies into Afghanistan, and hopes something positive can grow out of all these events.

"We have to change this tragedy into a positive future," he said. "The world community has to work hard to build a better Afghanistan, and to break the cycle of violence and counter-violence."