

AN EDITOR'S NOTE: BALANCING SECURITY AND LIBERTY

The Editors



America is a nation of immigrants...so the saying goes. Since the tragedy of 9/11, that saying has effectively been called into question. In response to the attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, the President and Congress set forth a torrent of legislation to ensure that those who perpetrated this tragedy would never be able to strike again. All of those involved in the attacks were immigrants, notably from Middle Eastern and South Asian nations. Additionally, they came into the country legally. Indeed, the INS and FBI were unable to prevent the attacks. That much is fact.

America, now more than ever, is grappling with issues of security. While in the past wars were fought between nations, today a threat just as, if not more, significant comes from individuals. And that brings attention to immigration policies. Specifically, what can we, as a nation, do to prevent the entry of terrorists into this country? The articles presented in this issue of *The Subcontinental* survey the extensive changes that have taken place in U.S. immigration policy. Additionally, they provide unique perspectives, which are not visible in common debates, concerning the various peoples who have been affected by the changes. South Asian Americans have a unique perspective to contribute to Homeland Security. As loyal Americans and as people who can feel and understand how U.S. policies are seen by the world, South Asian Americans have a duty to participate in the shifting politics of America.

According to the South Asian American Policy Research Institute (SAAPRI) in Chicago, roughly 75% of South Asian Americans are immigrants. Many of these immigrants feel that it is not their place to speak out against or about Homeland Security. Indeed, it is the voice of these immigrants, who came to America by choice, that is needed in the national discourse. It is only by reaching out to these communities that Americans will understand how its policies are perceived internationally, how they effectively secure American borders, and how they live up to this nation's unique destiny.

As a note, many of the pieces contained herein are critical of American immigration policies. The Editors understand that these policies are in the process of flux and that many have been enacted out of a need to do something in the wake of the terrible tragedy of 9/11. We approached the Department of Homeland Security looking for pieces supporting the reforms and were turned down. So, in their place, we request that the readers approach each piece as a voice contributing to the goal of finding the delicate balance between security, effective policy, and respect for each of the individuals and cultures that comprises the United States.

The Works Featured:

Top immigration advocates **Sheela Murthy** and **Carla O'Donoghue** trace the changes in immigration policy September 11th, 2001. The piece cites some of the successes and shortcomings of the new policies, especially in the realm of civil liberties. Murthy and O'Donoghue remind us of the importance of educating policy makers about the concerns of those who stand to be affected by racial profiling and immigration restrictions.

Shoba Sivaprasad and **Sin Yen Ling** present the hardships faced by many immigrants through the eyes of two brothers. Their story forces us to consider the ramifications of racial profiling and Special Registration. Sivaprasad and Ling remind us that rights and security must be balanced.

Attorney, educator, and activist **Deepa Iyer** sets the framework for the Civil Rights issue, presenting background on the most important issues surrounding post-9/11 reforms in immigration policy and security. Iyer views special registration and other reforms in a historical context and provides suggestions to grassroots organizers looking to get involved in this issue.

Julie Rajan, Assistant Editor of *The Subcontinental* and Ph.D. student at Rutgers University, presents a compelling and emotionally stirring interview with a post-9/11 detainee from Guyana. The piece gives a firsthand account of the effects of the INS and Patriot Act reforms on members of the South Asian Diaspora and presents a call to action to the South Asian American community to unite around this issue. The piece also includes a response essay by Managing Editor of *The Subcontinental* and current Fulbright Scholar **Mahnu Davar**, arguing that South Asian Americans need to become aware of the dangers of using socio-economic differences among community members as a temporary protective measure to distance themselves from the misfortunes of one subgroup.

After her brother, a former United States military officer, was harassed and questioned about his suspected involvement with terrorism (namely flying to Argentina and owning and reading Urdu detective novels), **Irum**

Sheikh decided to take up the banner of activism. In her piece, Sheikh asks if it is “possible to read, trace and locate gender in a male dominated discourse.” This unique essay explores the affect of deportation and other stringent government measures, which target South Asian and Middle Eastern men, on women and their families.

Naeem Mohaiemen, Bangladeshi activist and prior contributor to *The Subcontinental*, returns to offer a poignant opinion piece on the effects reforms are having on Bangladeshi immigrants. The piece warns policy-makers that the deportations and humiliating questions that accompany special registration is alienating, and effectively exiling, an entire immigrant community, and doing little more than fostering resentment and ill-will to the country that many had once wished to call home.

Victor Johnson, associate executive director at NAFSA: Association of International Educators, rounds out this issue with his piece originally printed in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Johnson provides an informed appeal to policy makers about the disastrous long-term effects on national security that may accompany current immigration reforms. He reminds us that America is the land of opportunity for the world, and part of that engender this goodwill towards America is its liberal student visa policies. Johnson reminds his readers of the challenges that face America if it turns a cold shoulder to the future cultural ambassadors and educators of South Asia.

We hope you find this issue educational. For comments, concerns, and feedback, please send letters to:

The Subcontinental
3105 17th Street, NW
Washington, DC 20010
info@subcontinental.org