

Iranian snared in Canada's spy bureaucracy

CSIS alleges scientist is a terrorist, but agency's watchdog says let him in

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Saren Azer is still waiting. It's been four months since Canada's intelligence watchdog recommended that the Iranian refugee receive landed-immigrant status. Its report strongly criticized his investigation by the national spy agency, CSIS, for alleged terrorist activities.

And the wait, which began in 1995 when Mr. Azer applied to become a Canadian resident, is certain to stretch out even longer because there's no guarantee that the Security Intelligence Review Committee report will do anything more than collect dust.

SIRC, the watchdog, which has no authority over the federal Immigration Department, is meeting today in Ottawa and sources say Mr. Azer's case is on the agenda.

The delay in resolving his immigration status has prompted the 33-year-old scientist to speak publicly without the veil of a pseudonym for the first time.

"It has affected my life at every level," he said in an interview with The Globe and Mail. "I appeal to the Minister of Immigration: Help me."

Mr. Azer, who lives in Edmonton, is a world-renowned asthma researcher at the University of Alberta. Without his landed-immigrant papers, he has not been able to travel to international conferences to present his work or accept awards on behalf of the university.

The Canadian Security Intelligence Service contends that Mr.



Asthma researcher Saren Azer of the University of Alberta is being denied landed-immigrant status in a fight between CSIS, which claims the Kurdish activist is dangerous, and its watchdog agency.

JOHN ULAN/The Globe and Mail

minister wrote to Mr. Azer's lawyer, Shirish Chotalia.

SIRC, which is authorized by law to examine all of CSIS's workings and to report to Parliament, has no authority over the Immigration Department. As a result, Mr. Rae's report is not binding.

"He doesn't have a mandate over us, and we don't have a mandate with him. And that's the way it

His file was passed to CSIS.

Mr. Azer, who takes no issue with being investigated by CSIS, just its findings, says the agency's officers have followed him and told him he would get his papers if he worked with them to provide information on other refugees. Dan Lambert, a

CSIS spokesman, denies the allegations.

In some ways, this situation is emblematic of the tension that exists between CSIS and SIRC. The watchdog complains that the spy agency doesn't make its decisions based on facts,

wednesday, August 9, 2000
The Globe and Mail
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