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**NATIONAL POST****EI-Nashar not known as an extremist**

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The Daily Telegraph, with files from Reuters

CAIRO - To all appearances, Magdi EI-Nashar, the 33-year-old biochemist arrested here yesterday in connection with the London suicide bombings, was a hardworking, pious and apolitical student who offered free chemistry lessons to young people in his spare time. "I wasn't aware that the police were searching for him. It is impossible that my son could have planned such a terrible thing as that," said his father, Mahmoud EI-Nashar, a retired engineer.

The younger Mr. EI-Nashar grew up in a tiny apartment in a working-class district in southern Cairo, a stone's throw from the local mosque.

He gained a BSc in biochemistry at Cairo University in 1994 and a master's in 1998. The following year he won a government scholarship to study biochemistry at Leeds University, but spent a semester studying chemical engineering at North Carolina State University. Neighbours recall Mr. EINashar, his younger brother and their father praying at the mosque five times a day, including every dawn prayer. The mosque's former imam said Mr. EI-Nashar used to offer free chemistry lessons to young students in his spare time. For many years, Mr. EI-Nashar did not have a beard, although he had a zabiba, or indent on his forehead, from his constant prayer. His sister, Mona, wears a full face veil, which is unusual in Egypt. Like all three EI-Nashar children, she was well-educated and a university graduate.

"They were very isolated from people. [Magdi] was rarely seen talking to people," Rifai Sayed Taha, whose brother is married to Mona, told The Associated Press.

Others insist although Mr. EINashar was devout, he was no extremist.

Hamdi Hamouda, head of Cairo University's chemistry department, said, "EI-Nashar was one of Cairo University's top students. He was a quiet person, and I certainly do not remember him joining into any political activities, or student demonstrations of any kind." Added another staff member, "I remember him well from the time that he was doing his masters -- he certainly never seemed to possess any extreme ideas, and did not strike me as someone who had different or radical religious ideologies. I remember that he did not

even wear a beard."

The female academic said, "He had a promising future ahead of him, and it is very difficult to believe he's behind the attacks. It must be a mistake by British police."

Tareq Mohammad, a fellow postgraduate student, said, "He was a bright person and he wasn't one of the students who talked about either politics or religion in class."

A Leeds University spokeswoman said Mr. El-Nashar was working on the "development of a novel matrix for the immobilization of enzymes for biotechnology." She described this as environmentally friendly research involving "chemically inactive substances" with implications for the food industry. He had been awarded his doctorate in May.

Friends and colleagues in Leeds were similarly shocked at the news of Mr. El-Nashar's arrest. "He had a great personality. You would never ever expect this kind of action from him. Impossible," said Kadhem Al-Rawi, a doctor in Islamic principles at the European Institute of Human Sciences in Wales.

"He had lots of friends here; half the mosque were his friends. He never got into politics. He just completed his studies, got his degree and got a lecturing job," added Mr. Al-Rawi, former chairman of Leeds Grand Mosque where Mr. El-Nashar used to pray.

Leeds University said Mr. Elnashar had not been seen on campus since early July.

"We understand he was seeking a post-doctoral position in the U.K. and that his visa was updated by the Home Office early this year," the spokeswoman said.

Hani el-Nazer, director of the National Research Centre in Cairo, said the man came home on holiday two weeks ago and seemed perfectly normal.

He spent his first days at the centre, turning in his PhD thesis based on his Leeds research and meeting colleagues.

"I asked [people] if they noticed anything about him, and they said he was behaving normally during the last week before he took holidays," Mr. el-Nazer said.

"[El-Nashar] has denied any involvement in the London bombings," said an official at the Egyptian Interior Ministry.

"He said he had come back to Egypt for a month and a half holiday and was planning to go back to Britain to resume his studies and that all his belongings are still in his apartment in Leeds."

