

3 to be extradited in alleged JFK plot

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PORT-OF-SPAIN, Trinidad --

A judge Monday ordered three men extradited to the U.S. to face charges in an alleged plot to attack New York's John F. Kennedy International Airport, and a confidential U.S. document said they planned to seek help from Iran.

Chief Magistrate Sherman McNicolls rejected without comment a defense argument that the men could not be extradited on conspiracy charges under Trinidadian law.

Taped conversations between the alleged conspirators show they planned to seek Tehran's help in a strike intended to dwarf the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks, according to a 28-page document signed by Assistant U.S. Attorney Marshall C. Miller and delivered to lawyers here.

"We can try to send someone to Iran to get the movement, the revolutionary movement, and they can discuss that plan there," Trinidadian suspect Kareem Ibrahim, an Islamic cleric, was quoted as saying in the confidential report, which was shown to The Associated Press.

Russell Defreitas, a U.S. citizen who worked as a cargo handler at the airport until 1995 and is now in custody in New York, told Ibrahim that when contact was made with the Iranians, they should be told the attack should be staged late at night in the winter, because "these are the times they don't respond to nothing. Traffic slow down. Security slow down. Everything slows down," according to the document.

In another conversation, Ibrahim said he had recruited one of his associates, described in the document only as "individual F," who would "travel to Iran and present the plot to militants there."

"He say he will go," Ibrahim is quoted as saying. "All he has to do is renew his passport."

But then U.S. authorities stepped in, apparently before the overture to Iran could be made.

Officials at the Iranian Embassy in Washington did not immediately return a phone message seeking comment Monday evening.

One of the three who faces extradition from Trinidad to the U.S. is Abdul Kadir, who was arrested in June as he was boarding a flight from Trinidad to Venezuela and planned to travel to Iran. His wife said he intended to attend an Islamic religious conference in Iran.

Kadir was an opposition legislator in Parliament in Guyana, a South American country along the Caribbean coast, until last year. Kadir, who is a cleric, studied Islam in Iran in the 1990s.

Richard Clarke-Wills, a lawyer for Abdel Nur - the third defendant in the extradition hearing - said he would appeal the ruling to the country's High Court and a decision should take at least six weeks.

Attorney Rajiv Persad, who represents Ibrahim and Kadir, said he had to speak to the men before deciding whether to pursue an appeal.

David West, a senior official in the Trinidad Attorney General's office, said the U.S. document is convincing.

"The evidence, in my view, was sufficient to warrant the magistrate to commit the defendants to be extradited," West said in a telephone interview.

But Clarke-Wills insisted that a confidential U.S. government informant entrapped the men into plotting to attack the New York airport.

"If it were not for the intervention of this source you would not have these three men before the courts," Clarke-Wills said before the ruling. "They had no terrorist aspirations or ideals ... I have no doubt whatsoever this is a clear case of entrapment."

Two of the suspects scoffed at the accusations before the hearing.

Nur and Ibrahim spoke briefly to The Associated Press as police escorted them with Kadir into the court in downtown Port-of-Spain for the extradition hearing.

"It's false," Nur told AP. "It's a setup. It's a big setup by the drug dealers."

Nur, who is from Guyana, was apparently referring to the confidential informant, a convicted drug dealer who taped conversations in which the suspects allegedly plotted to blow up a fuel pipeline that runs through residential neighborhoods and supplies the airport.

He underscored his point with a white T-shirt that proclaimed "No Extradition by Entrapment" in black letters on the back.

Ibrahim, who is from Trinidad, said of the allegations: "It's a movie."

The third suspect, Abdul Kadir, smiled but said nothing as he entered the Caribbean country's colonial Magistrate's Court, which was guarded by about a half a dozen police.

Their lawyers argued the men could not be extradited for conspiracy under Trinidadian law - a claim challenged by Douglas Mendes, a lawyer appointed to represent the U.S.

Mendes declined to comment on the defense claims that the men had been entrapped.

The three men were arrested in Trinidad in June, when U.S. authorities announced they were part of a cell led by a U.S. citizen Russell Defreitas, a Guyana native who worked as a cargo handler at the airport until 1995. Defreitas is in custody in New York.

The U.S. indictment charged the four with conspiring to "cause death, serious bodily injury and extensive destruction" at the airport.

Defreitas has not yet entered a plea to the charges and his lawyer has asked for a psychological evaluation of him.

Authorities alleged the plotters unsuccessfully sought support in Trinidad from Jamaat al Muslimeen, a radical Islamic group that staged a deadly coup attempt here in 1990. The leader of the Trinidadian group, however, has denied any link to the alleged plot.