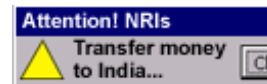


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Bush thwarted FBI probe against bin Ladens

AFP
(London, November 7)

FBI agents in the United States probing relatives of Saudi-born terror suspect Osama Bin Laden before September 11 were told to back off soon after George W Bush became president, the BBC has reported.

The BBC's Newsnight current affairs programme on Tuesday said that Bush at one point had a number of connections with Saudi Arabia's prominent Bin Laden family.

It added there was a suspicion that the US strategic interest in Saudi Arabia, which has the world's biggest oil reserve, blunted its inquiries into individuals with suspected terrorist connections -- so long as the US was safe.

Newsnight reported it had seen secret documents from an FBI probe into the September 11 terror attacks that showed that at least two other US-based members of the Bin Laden family are suspected to have links with a possible terrorist organisation.

The programme said it had obtained evidence that the FBI was on the trail of Bin Laden family members living in United States before, as well as after, the terrorist attacks.

Newsnight said Bush made his first million 20 years ago with an oil company partly funded by the chief US representative of Salem Bin Laden, Osama's brother.

Bush also received fees as director of a subsidiary of Carlyle Corporation, a little-known private company which in just a few years since its founding has become one of America's biggest defence contractors, and his father, George Bush Sr, is also a paid advisor, the programme said.

The connection became embarrassing when it was revealed that the Bin Ladens held a stake in Carlyle, sold just after September 11, it added.

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