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7:41pm (UK)

Security Sources Dismiss Claims of Suspects' Family

By James Tapsfield and Nick Allen, PA News

Relatives of two brothers suspected of plotting a terrorist bombing outrage in Britain today made extraordinary claims that they were visited by an MI5 agent in the weeks before they were arrested.

The bizarre story was immediately dismissed by security sources as "complete rubbish" but the men's family remained adamant that an agent called "Mr Gould" spoke with them three times and urged them to leave the UK.

Computer student Omar Khyam, 22, and his brother Shujah Khyam, 17, from Crawley, Sussex were tonight undergoing a second night of questioning at high security Paddington Green police station in London along with their cousin Ahmad Khan, 18, a journalism student, and five other men.

The eight suspects, all British citizens and Muslims, were held under the Terrorism Act as police found half a ton of ammonium nitrate fertiliser which they believe could have been used in a devastating blast.

Sajjad Ahmad, the uncle of Omar and Shujah Khyam, claimed an MI5 agent had first appeared a month ago.

"He came to my house. We got in my car and went down to Sainsbury's car park," he said.

The agent allegedly told him there were two categories of people the authorities were concerned with – those who were a threat to national security and those who were in trouble but did not pose a threat to national security.

Mr Ahmad said the agent did not think his nephews posed an immediate threat but urged the family to send the boys to Pakistan for a year.

"He said if they would be willing to leave, it would make (the security services') life easier," said Mr Ahmad.

He claimed tickets had been booked for Omar and Shujah to fly to Pakistan on April 6 at 8.30am and he was "absolutely gobsmacked" when the police arrived to arrest them.

"I have faith in the police and the intelligence services. I think they are there to protect us. Something happened at the last hour," he said.

Mr Ahmad showed reporters his mobile phone with what he claimed was the MI5 agent's number on the display.

He tried to call the number, but reached an answerphone. He said he had not been in contact with Mr Gould for the past week.

Mr Ahmad made his bizarre claims as the Muslim Council, Britain's leading Islamic organisation, began writing to 1,000 mosques urging them to maintain the "utmost vigilance" in the war against terror.

The appeal to the two million-strong Muslim population was

Friday, 2nd April 2004

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welcomed by Prime Minister Tony Blair.

He told the House of Commons: "The threat from terrorism affects every family in this country – Muslim and non-Muslim alike – and it's right that we all work together to defeat this threat and don't allow the extremists to divide us."

Anti-terrorist police, meanwhile, said the alleged bomb plot was not linked to the March 11 Madrid bombings which killed 191 people.

But in Spain Interior Minister Angel Acebes said a possible connection to one of the British suspects was being investigated.

In Canada Mohammad Momin Khawaja, 29, a software developer, appeared in court charged with "facilitating terrorist activity" in London.

Khawaja, a Canadian of Pakistani descent, appeared in an Ottawa court in shackles and a bullet-proof vest.

He recently travelled to London but claims he was meeting a prospective bride.

Suspect Ahmad Khan's father Ansar Khan, 48, a taxi driver who works at Gatwick Airport, defended his son and his nephews Omar and Shujah Khyam.

He claimed young Muslims were being brainwashed with "wrong" teaching in certain mosques in London but denied his son and nephews were terrorists.

Ahmad was a "very quiet boy" and a "good Muslim" who prayed five times a day, he said.

He said his son cried and called for his mother as he was taken away by police.

"These boys are the cricketers, Manchester United fans. Fish and chips is their favourite food," he said.

Omar went to Hazelwick School and studied for his A-levels in Reigate, Surrey.

In 2000, when he was 18, he told his mother he was going to France on a study trip but instead travelled to the Pakistan-Afghanistan border area.

His family flew out to Pakistan and brought him back to Crawley after around six weeks. Relatives in the Pakistan army helped in the search.

At the time Mr Khan said: "This was not a boy who was political. He loved Britain. He talked of playing cricket for England."

Omar was a talented cricketer who captained his county at under-18 level and was tipped to have a professional future in the game if he wanted.

Police are also examining five computers and eight laptops from an Internet cafe in Crawley, according to the proprietor.

Jafar Nazir, 34, who runs PC UK, said officers told him two suspects had used the computers and they needed to check the records.

More than 700 police officers were involved in 24 raids in Tuesday's operation, code-named Crevice.

The eight suspects, aged 17 to 32, were held on suspicion of "being concerned in the commission, preparation or instigation of acts of terrorism".

The ammonium nitrate fertiliser – the same explosive ingredient already used in terror attacks in Bali, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Africa and the US – was found at a self-storage unit in Hanwell, west London.