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Plot to use planes in US attacks uncovered in RP

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Inquirer News Service

The plan

A PLAN to hijack US commercial planes and slam these into targets like the headquarters of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in Langley, Virginia, was first uncovered in Manila in 1995 after police arrested four suspects in a plot to assassinate Pope John Paul II.

Ramzi Zhmed Yousef, who was sentenced to life imprisonment for masterminding the bombing of the World Trade Center in 1993, incorporated the plan in "Operation Bojinka (loud explosion)," Abdul Hakim Murad revealed during his tactical interrogation.

Bojinka called for bombing commercial planes in midair, attacks on the US Embassy in Manila and assassination of government officials and foreign ambassadors.

The Philippine government passed the information obtained from Murad to the US Embassy and the US Joint Task Force on Terrorism.

But the US authorities were unable to use the information to prevent Tuesday's attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, Chief Supt. Avelino Razon, former chief of the Presidential Security Guard, lamented on Wednesday.

At least four of Yousef's cohorts in the 1993 World Trade Center bombing have remained at large, bolstering suspicions that they could be behind the latest terrorist attacks in the US.

"Basit (Yousef) had discussed with Murad the viability of suicide attacks and the need to have people die as martyrs for the

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(Islamic fundamentalist) cause. As such, Murad came out with the idea of flying an aircraft and crash-diving it on the CIA headquarters building," one of the tactical interrogation reports said.

By his own admission, Murad lent "intelligence support" to the 1993 World Trade Center bombing by conducting an ocular inspection of the building in July 1992 on Yousef's order.

Murad, a Pakistani born in Kuwait and whose real name is Abdul Basit Mahmood Kareem, was arrested on Jan. 7, 1995 at the Josefa Apartments in Ermita, Manila.

He then underwent interrogation at the Philippine National Police-Intelligence Command headquarters in Camp Crame from Jan. 17 to March 31.

Murad was extradited to the US in April 1995 where he was indicted in connection with the plot to bomb US commercial planes.

Murad, a Kuwaiti national, revealed to his interrogators that it was he who broached the idea of undertaking a suicide mission using a hijacked commercial aircraft in the US.

"What Murad had in mind was that he would board any American commercial aircraft pretending to be an ordinary passenger. Then he will hijack the aircraft, control its cockpit and dive-crash it at the CIA headquarters," said the report dated Jan. 17, 1995.

No bomb will be used in carrying out the "mission," according to Murad.

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