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Reporter: Al-Qaida considered attacking U.S. nuclear facilities

DUBAI, United Arab Emirates (AP) — Al-Qaida considered striking U.S. nuclear facilities in the Sept. 11 attacks and hasn't ruled out nuclear attacks in the future, an Arab television reporter who interviewed two plotters of the terror attacks said Sunday.

Yosri Fouda, correspondent for the satellite station Al-Jazeera, told The Associated Press that he was taken, blindfolded, to a secret location in Pakistan to meet Khalid Shaikh Mohammed and Ramzi Binalshibh in a June interview arranged by al-Qaida operatives.

Fouda said he waited until now to air the audiotaped interview — it is scheduled to run Thursday on al-Jazeera — because he wanted to include it in a documentary marking the first anniversary of the attacks.

A videotape of al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden released by U.S. officials in December for many established al-Qaida's responsibility for Sept. 11. According to Fouda's account, Mohammed and Binalshibh spell out the link even more clearly.

U.S. officials regard Mohammed as one of the high-

est-ranking al-Qaida leaders at large and believe he is still planning attacks against U.S. interests. U.S. officials say Binalshibh was a member of a Hamburg-based cell led by Mohammed Atta, the Egyptian-born suspected lead hijacker on Sept. 11.

"I am the head of the al-Qaida military committee and Ramzi (Binalshibh) is the coordinator of the 'Holy Tuesday' operation," Fouda quoted Mohammed as saying. Sept. 11, 2001 fell on a Tuesday.

Mohammed said planning began two and a half years before Sept. 11 and that the first targets considered were nuclear facilities.

We "decided against it for fear it would go out of control," Fouda quoted Mohammed as saying. "You do not need to know more than that at this stage, and anyway it was eventually decided to leave out nuclear targets — for now."

Fouda, speaking by telephone from London, said al-Qaida operatives told him not to bring any electronic equipment — including a camera or recorder — to the interview. The al-Qaida members videotaped

the interview but instead of sending a copy of the video as they promise, sent him only the audiotape, he said.

Fouda said at one point, while he was being led blindfolded to the meeting, he thought he was going to meet with al-Qaida leader Osama bin Laden.

Fouda said during the two days he spent talking to the two, Mohammed once referred to bin Laden in the past tense and that a sense of disarray led him to believe bin Laden could be dead.

Fouda, an Egyptian reporter and host of al-Jazeera's investigative program Top Secret, said he flew to Islamabad, Pakistan's capital, and then to Karachi on al-Qaida instructions. In Karachi, he was taken blindfolded and via a complicated route to an apartment where he met the two men he recognized as Mohammed and Binalshibh.

Al-Jazeera had announced last week it will broadcast the interviews as part of its coverage marking the anniversary of the attacks against the World Trade Center and Pentagon.

Fouda wrote about the interview for London's *Sunday Times* in a story that appeared

this week. He told the newspaper that during the interview, he learned that the U.S. Coast Guard had been the fourth to hijack the twin towers of New York's World Trade Center and the Pentagon, while another plane crashed in a Pennsylvania field after passengers stormed the hijackers.

Fouda also learned there had been a sleeper operation in Germany since 1992 and detailed planning with a meeting in Afghanistan and other sleepers.

Once in the United States, Atta communicated with Binalshibh and al-Qaida officials via e-mail, Fouda wrote. But he had determined everything was ready, he telephoned Binalshibh in Germany a few days before Sept. 11.

The Qatar-based satellite station Al-Jazeera has drawn attention with its broadcasts of interviews with and statements by Osama bin Laden and his lieutenants.

NEWS IN BRIEF

Driver rescued after eight hours trapped inside truck

RICHLAND, Texas (AP) — A truck driver whose rig crashed into an interstate overpass Sunday was freed almost eight hours after the structure collapsed on top of him. The man's 19-month-old son died.

Rescuers cut away at the cab to get to the driver. Cleaster Broadway, 41, had been communicating with sheriff's and Department of Public Safety officials since the collapse, said Lt. Gary Myles.

Rescuers took advantage of an opening

created by a pillar sticking up through the concrete to rescue Broadway, who had been pinned between a pillar and an I-beam, said Lt. Ron Franks of the Corsicana Fire Department.

Rescuers continued to try to reach the toddler's body.

Four killed in collision of truck and freight train

DeGRAFF, Ohio (AP) — A collision between a freight train and pickup truck killed four people and injured another Sunday at a rail-

road crossing in northwest Ohio.

The injured victim was thrown from back of the pickup and the dead were trapped in the wreckage, said Logan Co. Sheriff Michael Henry.

The injured person was flown to Ohio Hospital in Columbus. Nursing supervisor Donna Geitter declined to release information on the person's condition.

Henry said crews were trying to remove victims from the wreckage several hours after the crash.

The CSX train was heading eastbound at the railroad crossing did not have warning lights, Henry said.

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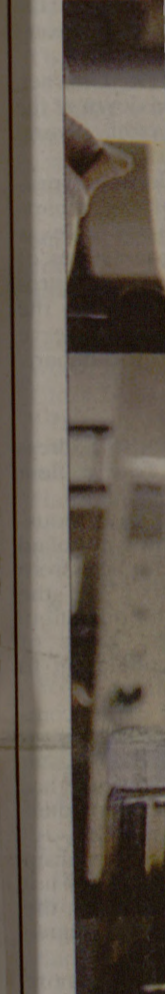
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