



Haneef 'al-Qaeda evidence' flimsy - reporter

By Hedley Thomas

August 03, 2007 07:35am

Article from: (<http://www.theaustralian.news.com.au/>)

THE AUSTRALIAN

IT was inevitable that sooner or later someone would connect the al-Qaeda network of terrorists to Mohamed Haneef.

He is a man deemed so dangerous that Australian Federal Police, ASIO and Immigration authorities let him out of custody to go home to India a day after the Commonwealth Director of Public Prosecutions had dropped its discredited criminal charge against him.

According to SBS journalist David O'Shea, who disclosed the al-Qaeda angle on Dateline on Wednesday night after meeting a police officer in Bangalore, the evidence suggesting a possible connection to Osama bin Laden's network was "flimsy", and the documentary material "pretty sloppy".

O'Shea told The Australian that a four-page police document, a rough biographical sketch he was given while on assignment in India, could have been compiled in part by an officer or clerical staff with access to Google News.

He said he hoped people would not read too much into the document, while criminal lawyers, including Lex Lasry QC, described it as irrelevant.

Dr Haneef's lawyer, Peter Russo, said the Haneef saga was akin to the movie Groundhog Day, where the central character was forced to endlessly repeat the same experiences every day.

"In this case, Dr Haneef has to endure a fresh slander every day, based on the most outrageous or unsourced claims," Mr Russo said.

"It is difficult to escape the conclusion that Dr Haneef is being used for political reasons."

O'Shea told The Australian: "At the very least it shows you how a document can have such an impact on (Dr Haneef's) reputation.

"When I was first given this, I treated it with complete scepticism. I'm obviously sceptical about the line about the link to al-Qaeda. It's flimsy yet tantalising."

Logistical difficulties prevented O'Shea from questioning the Bangalore officer when he was handed the document about the sourcing of the material in it or its veracity, but he suspected the officer gave it to him because of suspicions about Dr Haneef.

Gopal Hosur, Bangalore's deputy police commissioner, said in India yesterday that police in the city did not even have a file on the doctor.

"That is all incorrect and false," Mr Hosur said. "I don't know where they got this information from or who they're quoting."

The document SBS revealed misstated Dr Haneef's age, suggested he was working at the Gold

Coast Hospital in Britain, and misstated the name of his second cousin, Kafeel Ahmed. Next to the heading "Organisational set-up", it stated "Alleged links with al-Qaida". There was no elaboration.

Next to the heading "Overall assessment", it stated: "After having his education in Karnataka (in India's south), Mohammed Haneef must have come into contacts with the members of terrorist entities and assisted."

Under the heading "General information", it said: "It is learnt that a bank locker key was found in his position, which belongs to someone else. Mohamed Haneef is suspected to have rendered assistance to the prime accused persons in the Glasgow airport blast."

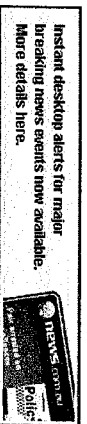
Despite the AFP having a presence in India and a top priority investigation into Dr Haneef, Commissioner Mick Keelty said the document and al-Qaeda link were news to him.

"I think, you know, I haven't seen the dossier, but I presume it's an intelligence-related dossier, in which case, it could be supposition, and it could be an amalgam of a number of different pieces of intelligence," he said.

"So, in terms of its face value, it's something that needs to be followed through, and obviously we need to chase up with our Indian colleagues."

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