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## Top Stories

### 'This is the world we live in now'

By: GARY PULEO , Times Herald Staff

06/29/2003

#### **NORRISTOWN - We may imagine our corner of suburbia as being too nondescript and mundane to ever harbor a terrorist.**

But even that innocent-looking two-story Colonial with the manicured lawn and the marigolds crowding out the petunias in the flower bed could be a hiding place for terrorist cells.

That's the reasoning of many local residents reacting to the news that federal prosecutors had charged an electrical engineer living in Norristown with conspiring to "engage in violent jihad" in countries at peace with the United States.

"I'm not surprised," said Mike Dellapena of Wayne, who works in Norristown. "These organizations are so low key and infiltrating. They don't wear a uniform. I always said since September 11, I would be surprised if they're in our area. If they can be in New Jersey, why can't they be in Norristown or Wayne or anywhere else? They slide right in, they're inconspicuous."

"We're not a closed society," he added, "so people can get in. Lots of good people get in; some bad people get in."

Deborah Walker-Holmes agreed.

"We always say things don't happen in a particular area, but no area is safe from any type of activity like this," said the West Norriton resident. "It's surprising that it's in Norristown. ... But this is the world we live in now."

Thirty-one-year-old Mohammed Aatique, a Pakistani national who had worked for high-tech companies and lived at Marshall Woods apartments in Norristown since last March, is one of 11 men, including nine Americans, indicted for alleged ties to a Pakistan-based terrorist organization.

The group's main goal, according to the indictment, is driving India out of the disputed Kashmir territory.

Aatique is accused of accompanying several of the defendants to a Pakistan training camp operated by Lashkar-e-Taiba, which the State Department lists as a terrorist group.

India says Lashkar-e-Taiba, which means "army of the righteous," was involved in hundreds of deaths including a deadly attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001. The indictment said the men prepared for military action by training in Virginia, Missouri and York, Pa., as well as at the Pakistan camp, using AK-47-style weapons, among others.

Aatique, along with seven of the other suspects, was arrested early Friday. Three remain at large, and are believed to be in Saudi Arabia.

Aatique was picked up at his apartment in the Marshall Wood complex on Forrest Avenue in Norristown and taken to the Philadelphia federal courthouse for a hearing before U.S. Magistrate Judge Jacob P. Hart.



He made no statement in court and is being held pending a July 3 hearing in Alexandria, Va. - where the indictment against all 11 suspects was filed. His Philadelphia attorney, Tariq El-Shabazz, indicated after the hearing that Aatique maintains his innocence.

Aatique is accused of conspiring to stage violent acts against friendly countries. In addition to India, the indictment says, Aatique and the others plotted to commit acts in Chechnya, the Philippines and other nations.

According to the indictment, Aatique traveled to Virginia, meeting with several of the men and then went to the Lashkar-e-Taiba camp in Muzaffarabad, Pakistan, near the Kashmir border, where he used weapons, including a 12mm antiaircraft gun.

All of the men reportedly attended Islamic fundamentalist lectures at the Center for Islamic Information and Education near Washington, D.C.

As part of the conspiracy, the men allegedly planned to "serve in armed hostility against the United States." But the indictment gives no specific information about any planned attack.

Aatique, who was born in Karachi, Pakistan, arrived in the United States in 1996 to study at Virginia Tech.

His master's thesis was on ways the telecommunication industry could develop the technology needed for 911 dispatchers to trace the location of emergency calls from cellular telephones.

In September 1997, Aatique went to work for Qualcomm in San Diego, then moved to Virginia, where he first worked at AT&T and later U.S. Wireless Corp. The indictment indicates that his role in the conspiracy began in July 2001, when Aatique told another of the defendants that he wanted to serve the Lashkar-e-Taiba organization.


A week after the World Trade Center attack, a meeting was held at his house, the indictment said, with three coconspirators, Yong Ki Kwon, Khwaja Mahmood Hasan and Masoud Ahmad Khan, visiting him.

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