

German court convicts first Sept. 11 defendant

Daniel Rubin
Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

HAMBURG, Germany — A German court on Wednesday convicted a Moroccan student of being an accessory to the murder of thousands in the Sept. 11 terrorist attacks, concluding that Mounir el Motassadeq was an al-Qaida operative who helped the Hamburg cell headed by Mohamed Atta carry out the suicide hijackings.

In a heavily guarded courthouse, Motassadeq, 28, the first person to go on trial in connection with the attacks, received the maximum sentence that German law allows, 15 years in prison, for his role in the deaths of nearly 3,000 people in New York, Washington and Pennsylvania.

Throughout the trial, which began in October, the former electrical engineering student proclaimed his innocence, acknowledging that he had attended a training camp in Afghanistan

that Osama bin Laden operated and had sent money to his fellow Muslim students. But he said he had no idea they were planning any violence.

Prosecutors countered that he had played an "ice-cold" role in helping a plot to turn airliners into weapons that resulted in "the most terrible terrorist attack in history." Presiding Judge Albrecht Mentz found the prosecutors had made their circumstantial case.

"The accused belonged to this group since its inception," Mentz said in reading the verdict. "He knew and approved the key elements of the planned attacks ... including the high number of victims."

The judge cited the testimony of Motassadeq's former roommate, who quoted him as saying, "They have something big planned... The Jews will burn, and we will dance on their graves."

When the judge gave the sentence, Motassadeq, standing with his arms crossed, squeezed his eyes shut. He was stunned by the verdict, one of his lawyers said afterward. The lawyer said they would appeal the verdict, which also found that Motassadeq belonged to a terrorist group.

A tall, gaunt man with a thin beard, Motassadeq (mo-ta-SAH-dek) moved to Germany in 1993. After studying German, he enrolled in an electrical engineering program at the Technical University of Hamburg-Harburg. Two years later, according to Germany's chief prosecutor, Motassadeq met Atta, the intense, Egyptian-born leader of the group of seven Islamic students who formed the nucleus of the Hamburg al-Qaida cell.

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News briefs

Bush buys foreign support for war

WASHINGTON — A public dispute this week over how much the United States will pay Turkey to help it weather a war in Iraq has highlighted the fact that President Bush is having to buy support for his policies toward Saddam Hussein.

U.S. diplomats are negotiating deals totaling billions of dollars with Turkey and others, including Israel, Jordan and Egypt, to defray the costs of war or cement official backing for American policy in nations where it is politically unpopular.

Turkey, which suffered an economic disaster from the 1991 war in neighboring Iraq, is asking for as much as \$30 billion in aid this time, much of it in loan guarantees that cost taxpayers little. As bargaining power, it is withholding its approval for the United States to station troops in Turkey to open a crucial second front against Iraq.

The Bush administration has offered \$6 billion in grants and \$20 billion in loan guarantees.

Simultaneously, a high-level Israeli delegation is in Washington hoping to wrap up an agreement on a package of aid to boost Israel's military and defray costs from the war on Iraq and the war on terrorism.

Israel, already the No. 1 recipient of U.S. foreign assistance, is asking for roughly \$4 billion in additional military

aid over the next two to three years, plus \$8 billion in loan guarantees.

Jordan, which neighbors Iraq and could face economic dislocation and an influx of refugees, has requested \$1 billion.

And Egypt, another top recipient of U.S. aid, recently asked for more assistance, too. It fears a sharp drop in tourism, a mainstay of its economy, from a new war in the Middle East.

None of the money has been requested by the Bush administration, much less approved by Congress. Lawmakers are beginning to ask questions about the foreign assistance bill they may be handed.

"What commitments has the administration made to some of our allies that could be very expensive in the future?" Rep. Gil Gutknecht, R-Minn., asked Secretary of State Colin Powell during a House Budget Committee hearing last week.

— Warren P. Strobel, Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)

Analysts warn about waiting on North Korea

WASHINGTON — U.S. policy options are dwindling fast on how to halt North Korea's headlong rush to build a nuclear arsenal.

The crisis over North Korea's nuclear weapons program will dominate talks when Secretary of State Colin Powell visits Tokyo, Beijing and Seoul beginning Friday. As it announced Powell's trip on Wednesday, the State Department balanced a demand that North Korea "visibly, verifiably and ir-

reversibly dismantle its nuclear weapons program" with a hint that the Bush administration would be open to talks, under certain conditions.

"We have no plans to attack or invade North Korea," State Department spokesman Richard Boucher said, adding that the Bush administration is "pursuing a peaceful approach."

But Washington has not said what its North Korea policy will be, even as analysts warn that North Korea may be dead-set on acquiring nuclear weapons and not willing to negotiate.

If North Korea quickly becomes a major nuclear power, Japan and other countries might seek nuclear weapons of their own, and the possibility of war on the Korean Peninsula would increase. Cash-strapped North Korea also could choose to sell nuclear weapons to terrorists.

North Korea could have a half dozen nuclear weapons within weeks or months. U.S. intelligence agencies say it already may have one or two.

Washington faces an "imminent danger" if Pyongyang begins serial production of nuclear weapons, said former Defense Secretary William Perry, who oversaw efforts to halt North Korea's nuclear program during the Clinton administration.

"If they get them, they might sell them to the highest bidder, including terrorists. Time is of the essence," Perry said at a forum last week at the East-West Center in Honolulu.

— Tim Johnson, Knight Ridder Newspapers (KRT)



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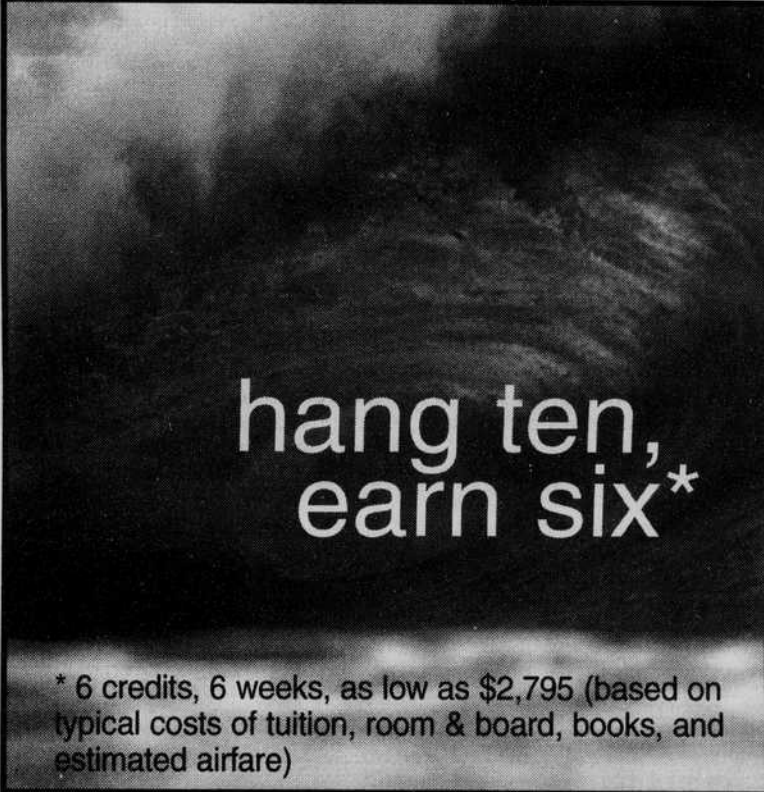
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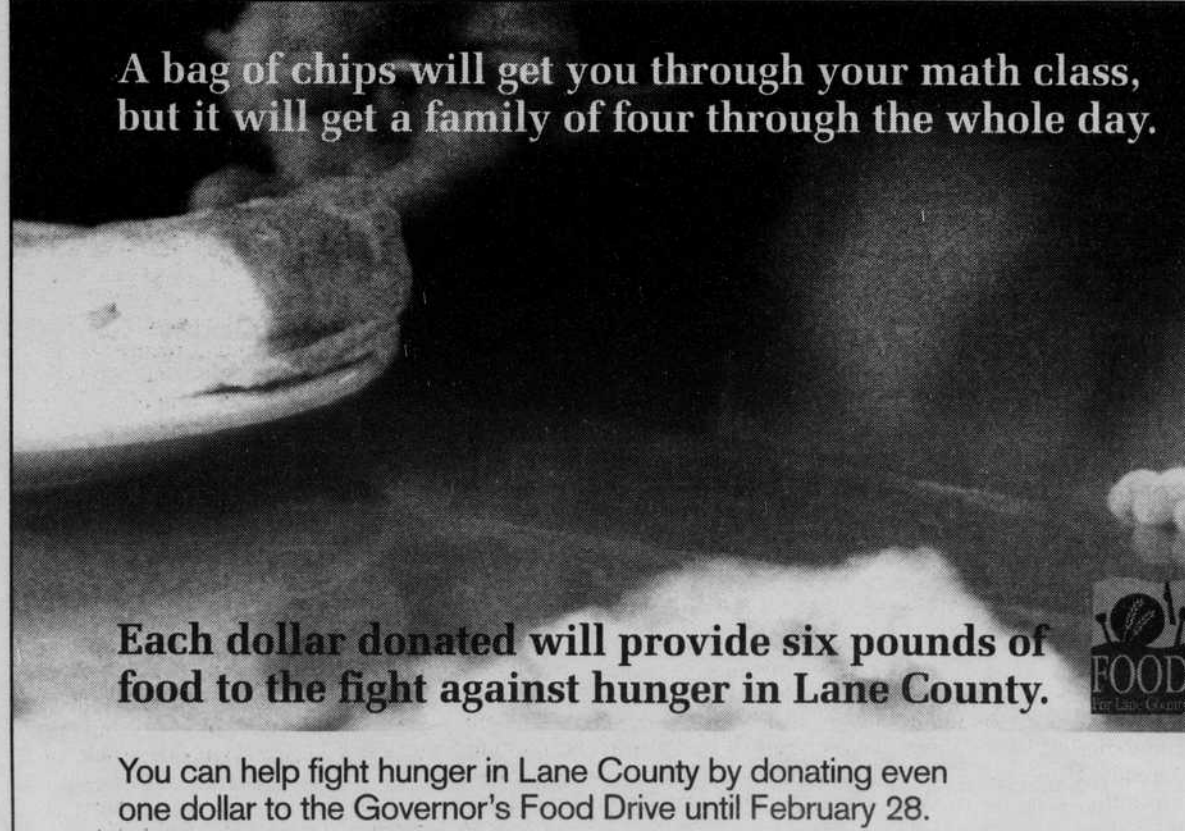
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