

INS ARRESTS ALLEGED TERRORIST; SUSPECT SOUGHT IN INDIA TOOK PLANE TO TWIN CITIES

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Body

Immigration officials said Friday that they plan to deport a man reputed to be one of India's most sought-after Sikh terrorists, who was arrested last week at Minneapolis-St. Paul International Airport.

Daya Singh Sandhu, 33, was arrested by agents of the Immigration and Naturalization Service on Aug. 3, shortly after he got off a morning flight from Newark, N.J.

Sandhu, who was traveling under an assumed name, was arrested without incident, INS officials said. Also arrested were his wife, Kamaljeet Kaur, 25, and Pinder Brar, 32, who is described by the INS as an Indian national living in Canada.

A 6-year-old boy traveling with Sandhu and Kaur was placed in "protective custody," said Dean Hove, the INS' acting district director.

"We think he (Sandhu) came into this country in order to effect entry into Canada for some reason," said Hove. "They must've considered it an easier way to enter Canada: to enter the U.S. first."

Just why Sandhu was going to Canada, however, remains a mystery, said Sgt. James Stinson of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police in Winnipeg, who was involved in the investigation.

"Only one person could tell you (why), and that would be him," Stinson said of Sandhu.

Sandhu was being held without bond pending a deportation hearing. Kaur was being held on \$50,000 bond, and Hove said security concerns prohibited him from saying where the two were being held.

After a court hearing in Minneapolis Thursday, Brar was ordered moved to North Dakota to face criminal charges there.

Hove said the INS waited a week to announce the arrest because the agency wanted to make sure Sandhu was whom they suspected, and whether the Indian government actually wanted him.

It does. According to the Indian Embassy in Washington, Sandhu is a Sikh terrorist wanted in India for a number of crimes. One of them is a September 1993 car bombing in New Delhi that killed eight people and injured 36 others.

The man said to be the target of the blast, Maninder Singh Bitta, was president of the governing Congress Party's youth wing. He was not killed by the remote-control car bomb, but two of his bodyguards were among the dead.

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Sikh separatists seek to create a new nation called Khalistan in the rich northern agricultural state of Punjab. Since the mid-1980s, thousands have died in the civil strife.

"Khalistan" means Land of the Pure.

Embassy officials said Sandhu was the leader of the Khalistan Liberation Force, and he is suspected of having been involved in political kidnappings and arms trafficking in India.

In a news release, INS Commissioner Doris Meissner said Sundhu's arrest in St. Paul "exposes the stark reality of terrorism."

But it also shows that sometimes, law enforcement simply lucks out. Sandhu's arrest stemmed not from a U.S. investigation into terrorism, but rather from an RCMP investigation into alien smuggling, said Sgt. Stinson.

"We just had an ongoing investigation here concerning another matter, concerning one of the other people who was arrested," Stinson said of Brar.

The information, he said, was passed along to the U.S. Border Patrol, "and they ran with the ball and lo and behold, look who they came up with," said Stinson. "They just got lucky that the person is an alleged terrorist."

Hove said the INS investigation shows Sandhu, Kaur and the child arrived in New York from London on July 6. They allegedly entered the country using bogus immigration papers.

They remained in the New York area until Aug. 3, when they took an early Continental Airlines flight to the Twin Cities.

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