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EUROPE

# New Brussels Attack Suspect Is Charged, Prosecutors Say

By ALISSA J. RUBIN   MARCH 26, 2016

BRUSSELS — Federal prosecutors in Belgium announced Saturday that they had arrested a suspect believed to have been deeply involved in the Brussels plot. He was charged with participating in a terrorist group, in terrorist murders and in attempted terrorist murders.

The man was identified by the authorities as Fayçal C. and in the Belgian press as Fayçal Cheffou, an independent journalist.

Eric Van der Sijpt, a spokesman for the Belgian federal prosecutor's office, said Saturday that the authorities were trying to determine if Mr. Cheffou was the man caught in a surveillance photograph on Tuesday right before the bombings at Brussels Airport.

The man, shown wearing a white coat and a dark hat and pushing a luggage cart, is believed to have escaped around the same time that two accomplices detonated their explosives.

The police found no weapons or explosives during a search of Mr.

Cheffou's home.

Mr. Cheffou appears to have made a video in July 2014 in which he stood in front of a detention center for refugees and asylum seekers in Steenokkerzeel, near Zaventem, where Brussels Airport is. In the video, Mr. Cheffou criticized the government for serving Muslim refugees meals before the end of the daily fast during the month of Ramadan.

He was taken into custody on Thursday, and the judge in charge of the case issued a formal arrest warrant on Friday in keeping with Belgian law, which requires a hearing before a judge and a warrant to be issued within 24 hours to keep a suspect in detention.

Three other men were detained in Brussels for further questioning, the prosecutor's office said. One was identified as Rabah N., who was mistakenly identified as Salah A. in a previous news release, the prosecutor's office said.

Rabah N. is accused of being connected to Reda Kriket, the suspect detained on Thursday near Paris by the French authorities. The French interior minister, Bernard Cazeneuve, said on Thursday that Mr. Kriket was in the advanced stages of planning an attack in France.

Mr. Kriket is believed to be a jihadist who raised money for a network of militants in 2012 and 2013 and traveled to Syria in late 2014. He was well known to the security services in both France and Belgium, and he was named in a 2015 court proceeding along with Abdelhamid Abaaoud, the chief on-the-ground planner of the Paris attacks.

Although details of the plot involving Mr. Kriket have not yet emerged, the authorities have said that so far it has not been linked to the Nov. 13 attacks in Paris or the attacks in Brussels last week.

Two other men were also being held. One, named in the prosecutor's statement as Abderamane A., has a criminal record in France, according to

press reports from the time of his trial that gave his full name as Abderahmane Ameroud. He was 27 years old when he was accused of providing logistical support to the two Tunisian suicide bombers who assassinated Ahmed Shah Massoud, the Afghan opposition leader, in 2001. Mr. Ameroud was convicted of complicity in the murder in 2005.

He was also linked to an Afghan and Pakistani network that was suspected of training would-be jihadists in the forest of Fontainebleau near Paris and in the French Alps. In 2007, Mr. Ameroud, an illegal Algerian immigrant, was also convicted of being part of a terrorist enterprise.

The Massoud assassination took place two days before the attacks of Sept. 11, 2001, in New York and at the Pentagon, and both were organized by Al Qaeda.

Mr. Ameroud's lawyer at the time of his trial, Isabelle Coutant-Peyre, said Saturday in an interview that he was "a really nice, sweet and polite person" who was singled out because he was an illegal immigrant in France. She said she had never been convinced of his guilt.

"He was on trial with six other people at the time and none of them seemed to know each other," Ms. Coutant-Peyre said. "He was accused of having been to Afghanistan before Massoud's death but it was based on notes from French intelligence and nothing really substantial."

Mr. Ameroud was sentenced in 2005 to seven years and served his time in a prison at Fleury-Mérogis in a Paris suburb and at Prison de la Santé, which is in Paris. Ms. Coutant-Peyre said she believed that he had been deported to Algeria after serving his sentence.

Mr. Ameroud was shot by the police on Friday and subdued at a tram stop in the Schaerbeek section of Brussels. Specific charges have not been filed yet, but the police said they were keeping him for an additional 24 hours for questioning.

The fourth man who the prosecutor said Saturday was being held and charged with participation in a terrorist group is named Aboubaker A. A man detained with him in a car was released.

The investigating judge in charge of these cases released a second person on Saturday, Tawfik A., who was detained Friday for questioning.

In Brussels, organizers canceled a “march against fear” planned for Sunday after the Belgian authorities urged people not to gather, citing the threat level and worries that the police would be stretched too thin to protect the march while continuing to investigate the attacks.

“We invite citizens not to demonstrate tomorrow and to postpone their march to a later date,” the Brussels police said in a statement after a news conference held by the interior minister and the mayor of Brussels.

“We understand that everybody wants to express their emotions in these circumstances,” the statement added.

On a Facebook page set up by the organizers of the march, some users said they understood the need to cancel the event, but others disagreed.

“By canceling we are showing them that we are afraid and they will have won,” said a user named Aurore Vandenborre. “I will be at the Bourse tomorrow,” she added, referring to the pedestrian square in front of Brussels’ 19th-century stock exchange building, where people have gathered around makeshift memorials since the attacks.

The Belgian federal crisis center published a brochure on Saturday titled “Terrorist Attack: What Next?” It provided guidelines for those with questions like “How do children react to traumatic events?” and “What can you do for someone who survived an attack or someone who lost a loved one?”

Brussels Airport said Saturday that it would remain closed until at least Tuesday.

The security on Saturday at Brussels' biggest train station, known as Bruxelles-Midi, seemed back to normal on Saturday except that there were now police officers and soldiers stationed at doors on either end, and some side doors were blocked.

But the police and soldiers were checking neither bags nor backpacks, and their presence seemed to be aimed mostly at instilling confidence in passengers and passers-by.

Since December, rail travelers from Paris to Brussels have had to go through metal detectors and a scanner set up at the lead car before boarding their trains.

Although most trains here were on time, some with international destinations, in France or the Netherlands, were running late for unexplained reasons.

After passengers boarded a train to Paris, three police officers passed through every car, methodically asking each person to present a passport or identity card and then scrutinizing the document.

Aurelien Breeden contributed reporting from Paris, and Kimiko de Freytas-Tamura and Lilia Blaise from Brussels.

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