

## Police: Student spoke of attacks before Sept. 11

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**BROOKLYN** ♦ Authorities are tracking numerous leads that some people, including members of the Arab-American community, heard rumors of the terrorist attacks on New York and Washington in the days leading up to the hijackings, law enforcement sources say.

"There have been leads where someone has alleged to have heard someone else boasting about how the attack was going to happen before it happened," said Jim Margolin, a spokesman for the FBI in Manhattan.

In Brooklyn, a high school freshman who recently immigrated from Pakistan was investigated by federal agents after his teacher reported that he had predicted the Trade Center's collapse a week before the towers were attacked.

The student pointed out a third-story window of New Utrecht High School toward the Trade Center and said, "Do you see those two buildings? They won't be standing there next week," according to three police sources and a city official familiar with the investigation. They said the comment came in the midst of a heated political discussion the student was having with his teacher in an English class for Arab-American students.

New York City Board of Education spokeswoman Catie Marshall confirmed that school officials reported the matter to police within minutes of the Sept. 11 attack.

The boy's teacher, Antoinette DeLorenzo, declined to comment, but students said that FBI agents and NYPD detectives descended on the school on Sept. 13 to interrogate the student and others in his class.

Brooke Lillman, a 15-year-old sophomore, said that when the news of the attack began circulating in the school, DeLorenzo locked her classroom door, fearing her students could be attacked by their peers.

A veteran city police detective familiar with the case said investigators have been learning that many people in New York's Arab-American community had heard rumors about the Sept. 11 attacks before they occurred.

The officer said the story "had been out on the street," and the number of leads turning up was so "overwhelming" that it was difficult to tell who had heard about the attacks from second-hand sources and who had

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heard it from someone who may have been a participant.

For example, since Sept. 11, various leads have been investigated regarding Middle Eastern employees who may not have shown up for work at the World Trade Center that morning.

One detective conducting such investigations in Brooklyn said they had become "a serious and major priority."

According to a recent report on the Sept. 11 attacks issued by the British government, intelligence sources have found that Osama bin Laden himself made comments before Sept. 11 that "he was preparing a major attack on America," and warned many of his associates to return to Afghanistan by Sept. 10. The report further states that known associates of bin Laden were naming Sept. 11 as a date of action.

Federal agents who visited the New Utrecht school questioned the student and his older brother, who also attends there, the sources said. Afterward, the agents tried to question their father, who chastised them for harassing his children, they said.

Police sources said that, after the interviews, the boy's father left for Pakistan. After his departure, investigators conducted a second interview with the boy and his mother, who told them that her son was having psychological problems.

The boy and his brother have returned to school, but police said the FBI discussed keeping them under surveillance.

School officials closed the school on Sept. 12, but FBI agents and city police combed the building the following day. They searched the backpacks and lockers of various students with Middle Eastern backgrounds, and spent several hours interviewing them in a locked room.

"There were cops all over the building," said Julian Sulaj, a 17-year old senior at the school. "It was security to the max."

The American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee in Washington, D.C., said Brooklyn has the largest population of Arab-Americans in New York City.

According to a federal indictment against bin Laden, FBI agents have linked the former Alkifah Refugee Center on Brooklyn's Atlantic Avenue to the Saudi fugitive-exile's terrorist network, al-Qaida.

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