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PERIL: 747 fire threatened jet

Trader who turned jet into flying timebomb

Financial Times

3 January 2006

FLYI to throw in the towel

FLYI, parent of Independence Air, said yesterday that it would voluntarily discontinue operations because of continued financial challenges facing the company.

The low-fare airline operator said it would halt operations as of Thursday January 5 2006, and said it was seeking bankruptcy court approval to refund customers with reservations

for flights scheduled to depart beyond that time. Reuters, New York

EXCLUSIVE

By Richard Crousey

PASSENGERS aboard a jumbo jet were blissfully unaware it was carrying cargo that could have blown their plane from the sky.

Packed into an ordinary-looking cardboard box in the hold were chemicals used to make weapons and rocket fuel destined for Iran.

An escape of gas could have caused an explosion or the release of poison fumes into the cabin with deadly results for the 163 passengers and 17 crew aboard the flight from Heathrow to Dubai.

Their British Airways Boeing 747 landed safely but the businessman who thought up the terrifying scheme was last week jailed for a year.

In the first prosecution of its kind, Manu Chandnani, of Penenden Heath, Maidstone, arranged for the three chemicals - two of which can

Chandnani, 54, who runs a one-man business called Scott Science in Headcorn, Kent, admitted endangering the safety of the aircraft and causing dangerous chemicals to be carried on a plane. He had labelled the contents of the box as a lab test kit.

Judge Jeremy Carey branded Chandnani reckless but accepted that he had not envisaged the risk to the aircraft and had simply been trying to further his business interests rather than help the Iranians to stockpile chemical weapons.

"You had a desire to further your business and enhance your profit - laudable motives in the everyday course of business but not when you put others at risk," the judge said.

Chandnani told the court his knowledge of chemicals was "almost nonexistent". He said: "It's all too easy for someone like me to succumb to pressure. My livelihood depends on these customers and I just obliged."

Chris Van Hagen, defending, said: "It was not greed that drove him to it. It was the pressure of work and this urge to please the customer for fear of losing them."

British Airways said the incident happened in May 2004. A spokesman added: "We take security extremely seriously and we are confident this won't happen again."

'I gave in to client pressure'

be used to make weapons and the other rocket fuel - to be flown to Tehran via Dubai.

They were packed into a plain cardboard box with no labelling or accurate documentation, Maidstone Crown Court was told.

The chemicals were so dangerous that not only are they banned from being transported by air but also prohibited from being sent to Tehran because of the suspicions over Iran's ambitions to build nuclear weapons.

The potentially lethal cargo was discovered as it was unloaded in Dubai for an imminent flight.

Tui expands with 40% Jet4you stake

German travel operator and shipping company Tui has bought a 40 per cent stake in Moroccan low-cost airline Jet4you for a single-digit million euro amount.

The airline's other stakeholders are Moroccan businessmen Guy Marrasche and Ahmed Benabbas-Taarji, as well as Attijariwafa Bank and the investment fund Investmia. Dow Jones, Frankfurt