

Salesman on Nuclear Circuit Casts Blurry Corporate Shadow

By **RAYMOND BONNER**

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KUALA LUMPUR, Malaysia, Feb. 17 — It has lately begun to seem as if B. S. A. Tahir, a prominent businessman here, had two faces.

Acquaintances describe Mr. Tahir, who is in his middle 40's, as a soft-spoken husband and father who lives in an upper-middle-class suburb of Kuala Lumpur and has a passion for fast cars and flashy clothes.

He has a financial interest in a fine-chocolates franchise in a shopping mall in fashionable Bangsar that was opened a couple of years ago by the wife of a top politician. Nearby is a gourmet date shop that he also partly owns.

In addition, Mr. Tahir has been director of an investment holding company called Kaspadu, until recently owned by his wife in partnership with the son of the country's current prime minister and another prominent businessman.

But investigators are trying to determine whether Mr. Tahir's legitimate businesses here have been a cover for nuclear black-market activities, a senior Malaysian official said.

President Bush, in a speech last week at the National Defense University, called him the "chief financial officer and money launderer" of an illicit operation headed by the Pakistani nuclear scientist Abdul Qadeer Khan. That operation has been accused of providing Iran, North Korea and Libya with technology for making atom bombs.

Investigators say Mr. Tahir put together a deal two years ago for a Malaysian company, Scomi Precision Engineering, to make nuclear-centrifuge parts for Libya, apparently without telling the company where the parts were going, according to company officials and corporate documents. The deal was exposed last October when a ship destined for Libya, the BBC China, was seized in the Mediterranean.

Scomi Precision's parent, the Scomi Group, is principally owned by Kaspadu, the holding company linked to Mr. Tahir, according to corporate documents on file with a government regulatory agency here.

Investigators say Mr. Tahir, a Sri Lankan who came to Malaysia in the mid-90's by way of Dubai, may have been sent by Mr. Khan to secretly procure nuclear parts.

They also suspect this was not the first time or country in which Mr. Tahir carried out an operation to acquire nuclear matériel, one senior investigator said, adding that in Malaysia, Mr. Tahir had "replicated" earlier operations — though the details of those are still unknown.



Associated Press

B. S. A. Tahir, a suspected middleman in the sale of Pakistani nuclear technology.

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Investigators have discovered that Mr. Tahir apparently traveled widely to carry out his nuclear-technology business. On one occasion, they say, he went to Casablanca, Morocco, to negotiate with Libyans for the purchase of the centrifuge parts, which are important in making fuel for bombs. On a trip to Switzerland, they say, he met with an engineer who came to Kuala Lumpur to supervise production of the parts.

Mr. Tahir also made trips to Germany and Turkey to meet with suppliers, the investigators said. A Malaysian official said Mr. Tahir's network included two father-and-son teams, one British and one Swiss.

In recent weeks, it appears Mr. Tahir has taken steps to cover up his past. His wife sold her shares in Kaspadu, some of them to the Malaysian prime minister's son, Kamaluddin Abdullah. In addition, a Dubai computer company that Western investigators say Mr. Tahir was using as a front has removed evidence of his involvement from its Web site.

He has not been arrested, but is under constant and close surveillance by Malaysian authorities, who say he declines to comment publicly. Nor did Mr. Kamaluddin respond to requests for interviews made at his home and his business.

Bukhary Seyed Abu Tahir was born in Tamil Nadu, India, on April 17, 1959, according to the Sri Lankan Embassy and corporate papers. When he was about 5, his family moved to Sri Lanka.

He later returned to New Delhi to study, and it was during this time that an uncle met Dr. Khan, according to investigators. The uncle had a business that supplied parts to Dr. Khan's operation.

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