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New York nuclear bomb scare after Sept. 11 attacks bared

Posted: 10:25 AM (Manila Time) | Mar. 04, 2002
By Agence France-Presse

NEW YORK - One month after the September 11 terrorist onslaught on the United States, senior US officials were informed that terrorists had obtained a 10 kiloton nuclear bomb and were planning to smuggle it into New York, Time Magazine reported.

In its latest edition due out Monday, Time said the highly classified intelligence alert was circulated to only a few top US officials and was deliberately kept secret so as not to panic New Yorkers.

The intelligence report was based on information from a US agent codenamed "dragonfire," described as of "undetermined" reliability by intelligence officials, Time added.

However, the alert dovetailed with reports that nuclear devices had gone missing from the Russian arsenal during the 1990s, specifically a report from one Russian general who maintained that his forces were missing a 10-kiloton bomb, Time said.

A 10-kiloton bomb detonated in Lower Manhattan could kill some 100,000 civilians, contaminate 700,000 more with radiation and flatten everything within half-a-mile of the blast, the news weekly reported.

The intelligence alert was so secret that New York's mayor at the time Rudolph Giuliani said he was kept in the dark and top FBI officials were also out of the loop, according to Time.

An intensive investigation was launched, and when counterterrorism investigators turned up nothing, according to Time, they concluded that the information from "dragonfire" was false.

However, the alert drove home continued US vulnerability to terrorism despite increased security following September 11.

"We are as vulnerable today as we were on 9/10 or 9/12," Karen Hughes, White House adviser to President George W. Bush, was quoted as saying. "We just know more."

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