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Ex-Businessman at Gitmo Petitions Court

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WASHINGTON -- A former Pakistani businessman is petitioning a federal appeals court over his detention at the prison camp at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba, saying the mastermind of the Sept. 11 plot and two other al-Qaida members in U.S. custody can exonerate him of terrorist activity.

Saifullah Paracha, who was arrested at the airport in Bangkok, Thailand, in July 2003, said he met Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan in 1999 and interviewed the al-Qaida leader in 2000 for his news agency, one of seven businesses Paracha said he owns.

Paracha says the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit should order the questioning of alleged al-Qaida members Majid Khan and Ammar al-Baluchi as well as the man who oversaw the terrorist attacks of Sept. 11, Khalid Shaikh Mohammed.

At a trial of Paracha's son late last year, written statements from Khan and al-Baluchi totally exonerate Saifullah Paracha of any knowledge of terrorist activities, Paracha's lawyer said in court papers filed March 8.

Paracha's lawyer also wants the court to order the questioning of Mohammed, who "was intimately involved in the contacts Khan and al-Baluchi had" with Saifullah Paracha, the court papers added.

Paracha's son, Uzair, 25, who says he was pressured into a false confession was convicted in New York in November of trying to help Khan slip past U.S. immigration officials using fake travel documents to carry out a chemical attack.

The judge in the case against Uzair Paracha did allow jurors to see summaries of Khan's and Al-Baluchi's statements to investigators. Both men said the younger Paracha did not know they were al-Qaida.