

BASEBALL, SOFTBALL AND LACROSSE CHAMPS CROWNED. IN SPORTS

2 N.J. men charged in terror plot

Agents: Pair aimed to kill U.S. troops with Somali help

By Josh Margolin
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

Two New Jersey men intent on killing American troops were arrested last night as they boarded flights to link up with a virulent jihadist group in Somalia, authorities said.

The men, both North Jersey residents, were charged with conspiring to commit an act of international terrorism through a group tied to Osama bin Laden's al Qaeda network,

according to officials familiar with the details of the arrests.

Mohamed Hamoud Alessa, 20, of North Bergen, and Carlos Eduardo Almonte, 26, of Elmwood Park were apprehended at John F. Kennedy International Airport in Queens before they could board separate flights to Egypt, where they were to start journeys to Somalia. The men were arrested by teams of state and federal law-enforcement agents who have

been investigating the pair since October 2006, according to the officials, who requested anonymity because they are not authorized to discuss the operation publicly.

Late last night, the state homeland security agency confirmed a police action at the airport but gave few details.

"Two individuals were arrested at JFK in connection with an ongoing investigation. At this time, we can

■ Somali group linked to al Qaeda is recruiting in the U.S. Page 16

provide no further details because the investigation is ongoing. The arrests do not relate to an immediate threat," said Jose Lozano, a spokesman for the state Office of Homeland Security and Preparedness.

Shortly after 10:30 p.m., FBI agents sealed off Alessa's street in North Bergen. The local police department would say only that an investigation

was in progress. FBI agents, North Bergen police and the New York Police Department descended on the home on 81st Street as neighbors looked on. According to property records, Alessa's parents, Mahmoud and Nadia Alessa, rented the top floor of their house amid a quiet row of middle-class homes. As agents poured in, lights went on throughout the house.

Just over 10 miles away, in Elmwood Park, 20 cars with agents and

SEE TERROR, PAGE 16

THE PRECIPICE OF POT:

First of two parts

With New Jersey expected to permit the sale of medical marijuana by fall or early winter, *The Star-Ledger* visited Colorado and New Mexico, where the drug is already legalized for medical reasons.

Medical marijuana: Lessons from the West



Aaron Scheible, left, visits Steven Wiskow, owner of Green Karma Medical in Denver, where Scheible purchases marijuana to treat HIV.

What Jersey can learn from Colorado's experience

Story by Susan K. Livio / Photos by John Munson
THE STAR-LEDGER

DENVER — When he's shaken by another wave of nausea or tremors begin shooting through his body again, Aaron Scheible walks across the street to a little basement shop in a restored 112-year-old Victorian house.

There, the 63-year-old former florist bears hugs Steven Wiskow, the owner of the establishment called Green Karma Medical. He slides onto a cushioned bench in a pale-yellow room where, with classical music playing softly, they examine the produce: dried marijuana buds in stylish glass decanters and an assortment of pot-spiked ice cream, brownies and candy.

Scheible leaves with a bag of edible and smokable "medicine" he swears is the key to his and his partner's longevity, three decades after their HIV diagnoses.

INSIDE

■ Marijuana producers are thriving, even in the recession. Page 9

WATCH THE VIDEO

Join John Munson on a trip to Colorado and New Mexico only at nj.com/videos.

COMING TOMORROW

New Mexico's laws are more like New Jersey's.

"I've stopped taking most medicines" because of pot, Scheible says. "The doctor knows about the marijuana and is okay with it."

Everything Scheible just did is perfectly legal in Colorado, where the medical marijuana business is booming — wonderfully for some, too much for others. Green Karma is one of 279 pot dispensaries in Denver; they outnumber Starbucks coffee shops four to one.

The ease with which pot can be bought and sold, and the proliferation of dispensaries, has so embarrassed elected officials that they've pushed through laws that will force a sizable number of

operators to close. Right now, Wiskow is fighting the city's rejection of his license over a zoning dispute.

"I'm worried about Steve staying here," Scheible tells visitors in the shop. He's "going to go broke and leave!"

With New Jersey expected to roll out its own controversial medical marijuana program by the late fall or winter, Colorado business owners, patients and government officials say the Rocky Mountain state provides a window into the best and worst the law has wrought since voters approved it by constitutional amendment a decade ago.

SEE POT, PAGE 8

Deal may end battle over state budget

Plan would stop shutdown, shift responsibility to GOP

By Claire Heineger and Lisa Fleisher
STATEHOUSE BUREAU

Despite Gov. Chris Christie's painful budget cuts and months of partisan battles over his plan, an agreement is taking shape between Democratic and Republican lawmakers that would avert a shutdown of state government and save a handful of popular programs scheduled for elimination.

The plan, described to *The Star-Ledger* by lawmakers of both parties involved in the discussions, would leave the Republican governor's \$29.3 billion budget largely intact, preserving most of the most unpopular cuts, like \$820 million in aid to school districts. But several smaller changes will be made, which could include more money for public libraries, keeping open Hagedorn Psychiatric Hospital in Hunterdon County,

"If the Democratic majority is unwilling to lead, we are certainly willing to do so."

Senate Minority Leader Tom Kean Jr.

and preserving the so-called blue laws that forbid Sunday shopping in Bergen County.

The deal would also entail a legislative maneuver placing responsibility for the budget on Republican lawmakers, a rare move with Democrats controlling both houses of the Legislature.

Lawmakers were reluctant to speak openly about specific programs and stressed the talks are not final. But they were emphatic about their goal — to pass a budget on June 24, a full week ahead of the July 1 deadline for Christie's signature.

"There's little appetite for a government shutdown on either side," said Sen. Kevin O'Toole (R-Essex), a member of the budget committee.

Senate President Stephen Sweeney (D-Gloucester) said there is "very serious discussion" about minority Republicans taking the lead on drafting and sponsoring the budget legislation, a role usually left to the majority party.

If Republicans take charge, only the minimum number of Democrats — four in the Senate, eight in the Assembly — would likely join the GOP in voting for the plan, lawmakers said. While Democrats would still control the timing of the budget votes — and several companion

SEE BUDGET, PAGE 4

TODAY
Chance of showers, with a high near 86°.



TONIGHT
Mostly cloudy, with a low around 54°.



MORE
Enter your ZIP code at nj.com/weather for hour-by-hour local forecasts.

News, Sec. One
2 Lottery
2 Weather
13 New Jersey

14 Editorial
15 Op-Ed
19 Obituaries

Business, Sec. 3
2 Business N.J.
4 Market Watch
5 Your Money

Sunday, Sec. 4
2 Flash
3 Movies
6 Sudoku

7 Advice
7 Crossword
8 Books



New Condos!

Model Grand Opening Today!

From the low \$300's!

CRESCENT COURT - JERSEY CITY

mmhomes.com/CrescentCourt
(201) 222-2745

M&M
Mazel & Mumford
A HomeSmart Company

HOMES
Highest in Customer Satisfaction with New-Home Builders in Northern New Jersey