

Deadliest US transportation incident since 2009

Limo in crash that killed 20 owned by FBI terror “sting” operative

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Additional details continue to emerge about Saturday’s limousine crash in upstate New York, highlighting extreme negligence and indifference to human life from the limo operator and the state and federal governments. The crash, which killed 20 people, was the deadliest US transportation incident since a 2009 plane crash that killed 50 people.

Among the most shocking revelations is that the owner of the limo company was Shahed Hussain, a key former informant and agent provocateur for the FBI, who was sent to troll mosques in order to entrap a number of individuals in “sting” operations involving fake terror plots that were of his and the FBI’s own making.

This included the infamous “Newburgh Four” frame-up in 2010, in which four gullible young men were lured with promises of large amounts of cash into a phony plot to bomb a synagogue and Jewish community center. The judge in the case, while claiming she had no choice in handing down 25-year prison sentences, acknowledged that the government “came up with the crime, provided the means, and removed all relevant obstacles.”

On October 6, the limo owned by Hussain’s company was carrying 17 passengers. It failed to stop at an intersection in Schoharie, New York, driving into the parking lot of Apple Barrel Country Store, a popular tourist destination. The limo struck two people in the parking lot and an unoccupied parked car, before colliding with an earthen embankment. The 17 passengers, the driver and the two people in the parking lot were all killed.

It has since emerged that the limo had failed an inspection last month, should not have been on the road

and had unregulated aftermarket modifications that likely made it a death trap for its 17 passengers. Moreover, the limo driver did not have the proper license and the limo company had failed multiple inspections in recent years.

Despite a grand jury calling for a state task force after a 2015 limo accident that killed four people, it appears that a task force was never formed, and that Cuomo’s administration did nothing to even put in place toothless regulations. In an attempt to shift the blame, Cuomo said Monday that “people just don’t follow the law,” and therefore new regulations may not be needed.

Additional information has emerged about the victims of this crash, who were traveling to a birthday party before their lives were violently cut short.

The National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) is investigating the crash, and a full report has yet to be issued. The NTSB investigation will include an examination of the limo’s airbag control module (analogous to an airplane’s black box) and an autopsy of the driver to determine if drugs or alcohol were involved in the crash.

What has already emerged, however, points to the grim fact that an accident of this scale was a ticking time bomb.

The company that operated the limo is Prestige Limousine Chauffeur Service, with a mailing address in Gansevoort, New York. Hussain owns four livery companies that all share the address of “a run-down motel in the Saratoga County town of Wilton,” according to the Rochester-based *Democrat & Chronicle*. In addition to Prestige, Hussain owns Chauffeur Service Saratoga, Luxury Limousine and Hasy Limousine.

Hussain emigrated to the United States from Pakistan and subsequently pleaded guilty to charges related to “helping people cheat on [Department of Motor Vehicles] exams in return for money.” With prison and deportation hanging over his head, he became an informant for the FBI.

He played the central role in the 2004 arrests of two Muslim immigrants in Albany in a supposed terror sting, along with the 2009 arrests of the “Newburgh Four.”

An attorney for one of the two men arrested in 2004, Kathy Manley, told the *World Socialist Web Site* in 2010 that the “Newburgh Four” case was “dependent on the credibility of a pathological liar and con man [Hussain].”

Hussain is currently in Pakistan and has not responded to press inquiries regarding Saturday’s crash.

Over the last two years, Hussain’s vehicles have been investigated five times, with four investigations resulting in the vehicle being ruled as unsafe. Despite an 80 percent failure record, no apparent attempt was made to ensure that any vehicles on the road would be safe.

The *Democrat & Chronicle* reports that “federal inspection records show two Ford limousines owned by the company failing inspections last month.”

Cuomo said on Monday, “That vehicle [in the crash] was inspected by the New York State Department of Transportation last month and failed inspection and was not supposed to be on the road.” Moreover, according to Cuomo, the limo driver did not have a commercial driver’s license with a passenger endorsement, required to operate a passenger limo.

The September inspections cited the limos “for defective brakes, lack of proper emergency exits, flat or balding tires, defective windshield wipers, and other maintenance problems,” according to the Associated Press, which also reported that the 2001 Ford Excursion had been modified after leaving the Ford factory to make it a stretch limo with seating for 19 passengers.

Such modified limos are subject to few federal regulations, and state regulations vary. NTSB Chairman Robert Sumwalt told the press that only some of the seats remained anchored to the limo’s floor after the crash.

According to a relative of one of the victims, the

limo “appeared in terrible condition” before the crash. They had originally rented “some kind of bus,” Valerie Abeling told the *Washington Post*, but were given the limo after the bus broke down on the way to the birthday party.

The intersection where the crash occurred was known to be hazardous. State Routes 30 and 30A meet in a T with a stop sign. Schoharie Town Supervisor Alan Tavenner said that the state Department of Transportation worked on the intersection about seven years ago, although he told the *New York Times*, “I honestly think it was a more dangerous intersection than it was before.”

Saturday’s victims included several young couples, newlyweds and parents of young children from around upstate New York. Among those killed were four sisters: Amy, Abigail, Mary and Allison. Amy was celebrating her 30th birthday. Abigail was a teacher in Amsterdam, New York.

Also killed were Amanda Halse, a waitress in Watervliet; Patrick Cushing, an employee of the New York State Senate’s Technology Services unit; Amanda Rivenburg, who worked at a non-profit for people with disabilities; and Axel and Rich Steenburg, two brothers who worked at semiconductor manufacturer GlobalFoundries.

The two pedestrians killed were Brian Hough, who was an assistant professor of geology at SUNY Oswego, and his father-in-law. The driver was Scott Lisinicchia.

New York State Police Major Robert Patnaude has suggested that Hussain could face charges in relation to the 20 deaths.

Aside from the gross negligence of the state and federal government in their enforcement of elementary safety regulations, the question arises whether Hussain’s companies were given special dispensation because of his services to the FBI.



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