



Department of Justice

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
10/20/10
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SLEEPING PASSENGER AWAKENS DURING ALLEGED SEXUAL ASSAULT ON AIR FLIGHT

Alpharetta Man Accused of Sexually Assaulting a 20 Year-Old Woman Traveling to Atlanta on Her Way to a Family Reunion

ATLANTA, GA - RANCHHODBHAI LAKHA, 61, of Alpharetta, Georgia, has been indicted by a federal grand jury on charges of assault, abusive sexual contact, and attempting to engage in a sex act with a person who was incapable of declining participation or communicating unwillingness to engage in a sex act. LAKHA is tentatively scheduled for an initial appearance/bond hearing/arraignment before a United States Magistrate on October 25, 2010.

United States Attorney Sally Quillian Yates said, "Sexual assault is a crime wherever it happens, including airplanes. Many passengers let their guard down or even fall asleep in the closed, often crowded environment of an airplane, which makes this kind of sexual assault so deplorable."

According to United States Attorney Yates, the charges and other information presented in court: On September 28, 2010, on a Delta flight from Dallas to Atlanta, a 20 year-old woman seated in the same row with LAKHA fell asleep, and woke up to discover LAKHA allegedly touching her below the waist. She quickly removed his hand and told him not to do that. LAKHA responded by asking the victim "Is that okay-- you don't like that?" The woman responded no and recoiled her body to protect herself. At that point LAKHA reached down and touched her again. The woman got up from her seat and reported the assault to a Delta flight attendant.

Further investigation by the FBI indicated that there may have been other similar incidents involving LAKHA, possibly in the state of Alabama, and have asked that anyone who may have been victimized by the defendant call the FBI at 404-679-9000.

Today's indictment charges one count of assault, two counts of abusive sexual contact and one count of attempt to engage in a sexual act with someone who is physically incapable of declining participation or communicating unwillingness to engage in a sexual act. The charges carry a maximum sentence of life in prison and a fine of up to \$250,000. In determining the actual sentence, the Court will consider the United States Sentencing Guidelines, which are not binding but provide appropriate

sentencing ranges for most offenders.

Members of the public are reminded that the indictment contains only allegations. A defendant is presumed innocent of the charges and it will be the government's burden to prove a defendant's guilt beyond a reasonable doubt at trial.

This case is being investigated by Special Agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

Assistant United States Attorneys Suzette Smikle and Joseph Plummer are prosecuting the case.

For further information please contact Sally Q. Yates, United States Attorney, or Charysse L. Alexander, Executive Assistant United States Attorney, through Patrick Crosby, Public Affairs Officer, U.S. Attorney's Office, at (404) 581-6016. The Internet address for the HomePage for the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of Georgia is www.justice.gov/usao/gan.