

# 3 Madrid bombing suspects deny any roles

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**MADRID, Spain** - Three men charged with placing backpack bombs on rush-hour commuter trains in Madrid denied Monday having any role in the 2004 terror attacks, contradicting witness accounts placing them there.

The three are among 29 defendants on trial for the attacks that killed 191 people and wounded more than 1,800. The trial, in its third day Monday, was expected to last at least five months.

One of the alleged bombers insisted his mother could corroborate his claim that he was asleep in bed when the bombs went off on March 11, 2004.

Another defendant said he was at a restaurant miles away when the trains blew up.

A third also denied taking part in the bombings. But he acknowledged having been friends with a Tunisian accused in the attacks, and with other alleged ringleaders who committed suicide three weeks after the bombings to avoid arrest.

Jamal Zougam - a Moroccan who ran the shop that sold most of the cell phone cards used to set off the bombs - gave the day's first testimony, saying he had been implicated as punishment for having refused to be a police informant.

Zougam, 33, said he was approached twice by Spanish police seeking help getting information about Islamic radicals, but he refused.

He told the three-judge panel that, following his detention two days after the bombings, an officer had visited his jail cell.

"He told me: 'If you had collaborated with us, this wouldn't have happened to you,'" Zougam said, testifying in the trial for a second day.

Zougam condemned the attacks, and denied he was a member of al-Qaida or any other radical Islamic group. "I live in Spain: This is like my country. Here, I live, I work, I eat," he said.

Zougam said his mother told the magistrate leading the investigation that he had been at home asleep when the bombs went off.

Another alleged bomber, Syrian Basel Ghalyoun, acknowledged that he was a friend of Serhan Ben Abdelmajid Fakhret and other ringleaders who blew themselves up as police moved to arrest them in the Madrid suburb of Leganes three weeks after the attacks, but denied having anything to do with the bombings.

Ghalyoun, however, said he knew Fakhret was a radical.

"Serhan considered the United States an enemy of the Muslim people," Ghalyoun said.

Moroccan Abdelmajid Bouchar, also placed by witnesses aboard one of the doomed trains, denied knowing any of the alleged cell members or having anything to do with the attacks.

Bouchar denied investigators' claim that he had been with seven alleged ringleaders in the Leganes apartment before they committed suicide. He is said to have gone down to the street to empty the garbage, seen the police coming, screamed out to warn his colleagues and then taken off running - so fast police later nicknamed him "the deer."

When asked by the prosecutor how he could explain the fact that traces of his DNA had been found on a date pit in the apartment, as well as his passport and other personal documents, he said: "I wasn't at that house and I don't know how these things got there."

All three of the defendants face sentences of up to 38,656 years - 30 years for each of the 191 killings and 18 years apiece for 1,820 attempted murders - though under Spanish law, the maximum time anyone can spend behind bars is 40 years.