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Kangaroo 's businesses see ups, downs after flight from Iran

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The former Guest House Motel in Livingston was Kangaroo's first Montana project. Kangaroo blames his troubles on Montana contractors he claims have overcharged or stolen from him, as well as the nation's current stumbling economy.

LARRY MAYER/Gazette Staff

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In his hometown of Mashad, Iran, real estate developer Hassan Kangaroo grew up in a family he describes as "very wealthy and famous," thanks to his late father's success in business and politics.

But the Iranian Revolution of 1979 toppled Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Iran's shah, or monarch. Fearing retribution for their ties to the shah, Kangaroo and his family fled the country, leaving behind what he said was a fortune in assets, including commercial aircraft and real estate.

Since moving to the United States around 1980 while in his early 20s, Kangaroo, now 49, has worked to restore the family fortune, meeting with mixed success along the way.

Much of his story - including his financial troubles and a criminal conviction in 1986 for selling restricted military parts to Iran's government under Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini - is detailed by Kangaroo in his own words in court documents.

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In 2006, Kangaroo filed a petition in U.S. District Court in San Francisco, seeking a review of his pending application to become a naturalized U.S. citizen.

In nearly 150 pages of transcripts from that case, Kangaroo discussed his efforts to bring his mother and sister to America, his dream of constructing a high-rise apartment building in San Francisco and his setbacks there as a real estate developer.

The transcripts, along with records and information gathered from San Francisco Superior Court and planning departments in cities and counties in California, show a businessman who has often had trouble developing residential properties and experienced financial ups and downs along the way.

Flight from Iran

In a sworn deposition in December 2006 for officials with U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services, Kangaroo said his father, Nasser Kangaroo, had owned an insurance company, real estate and Iran's second-largest airline.

"He was number one airline man in Iran, basically," Kangaroo said, adding that "we were very wealthy and famous, especially at the airports."

In fleeing Iran, three of Kangaroo's brothers and his father walked across the border into Pakistan. His father was jailed for a month for suspicion of being a Russian spy during the Soviet war in Afghanistan, he said.

His sister and mother were stuck in Iran and could not travel because the family was blacklisted by the fundamentalist government for its ties to the shah, Kangaroo told immigration officials.

It was his desire to secure safe passage for them, and not greed, that motivated him to sell restricted military parts to Iran, Kangaroo said. By currying favor with Iranian military leaders, he hoped to win their freedom.

"I didn't do anything wrong," he told immigration officials of his conviction 20 years earlier on one count of conspiracy, two counts of violating export control laws and two counts of filing false shipping documents.

Kangaroo said he made no money on the arms deals and sought only to bring his mother and sister to the U.S.

In October 1986, he was sentenced to 30 months in federal prison. He served 15 months behind bars and six months at a halfway house.

According to accounts of his jury trial in the Los Angeles Times, prosecutors said Kangaroo had posed as the head of a British company seeking to buy U.S.-made bombs, rockets, radios, surveillance cameras and parts for tanks and jet aircraft.

While living in Los Angeles and working at a bakery, and later at a company that manufactured closet organizers, Kangaroo succeeded in shipping to Iran by way of Europe only a single load of about \$100,000 worth of radio parts.

Under federal law, sale of the parts to Iran was forbidden without an export license that Kangaroo had applied for but did not receive.

But prosecutors said he boasted on wiretaps with federal undercover agents of shipping \$81 million in military parts to Iran while that country was at war with Iraq, boasting of a 40 percent markup on one deal, the Times reported.

On one tape, an undercover agent told Kangaroo the deal he was proposing was illegal, to which Kangaroo replied, "Yeah, that's what the problem is," the Times reported.

In the 2006 deposition, Kangaroo said the wiretap tapes were garbled whenever he insisted any deal must be legal, and those comments were not included in transcripts given to the jury.

Iran-Contra scandal

Just weeks after Kangaroo began serving his sentence, news broke of the Iran-Contra scandal, in which Reagan administration operatives secretly sold arms to Iran to fund Nicaraguan rebels fighting that country's leftist Sandanista government.

Kangaroo filed a request for a new trial, arguing that jurors might have acquitted him if they had known their government was selling arms to Iran, but the motion was denied, according to The Times.

In his citizenship application, Kangaroo referred to his conviction as a "regulatory offense" and said he believed that his business partners had obtained the necessary export license.

Immigration officials opposed his application, saying Kangaroo was wrong not to view his conviction as "a serious arms control violation."

His statements under oath were not credible, officials said, and they questioned his connections with an uncle, who Kangaroo said was his business partner.

Immigration officials told the court that Kangaroo "does not have the requisite good moral character" to become a U.S. citizen. U.S. District Judge Marilyn Hall Patel in San Francisco disagreed, ordering in January 2007 that Kangaroo's petition for citizenship be granted.