

Six suspects deny forging document

Central Bank witness tells court that Dh36b was never deposited with monetary authorities

- By Samir Salama, Associate Editor
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Abu Dhabi: Six of the seven people on trial for attempting to fraudulently withdraw 7.2 billion euros (Dh36 billion) from the UAE Central Bank using forged documents pleaded not guilty yesterday.

Appearing before the Abu Dhabi Court of Appeals, the six denied ever forging the document at the centre of the trial.

They said that the document was handed over to them by one of the defendants, an Iranian currently on the run.

Chief Justice Ezz Al Deen Abdul Latif presided over proceedings as a witness from the UAE Central Bank told the court the money had never been deposited with the monetary authorities.

The witness also confirmed that the UAE Central Bank only deals with governmental bodies and financial institutions.

"Never does the Central Bank deal with individuals," he said, responding to a question from Chief Justice Abdul Latif.

The four Iranians, two Germans and a Belgian were arrested in late January for allegedly trying to make fraudulent withdrawals worth 7.2 billion euros on forged documents from the UAE Central Bank.

Chief Justice Abdul Latif ordered the hearing to be adjourned to April 20, on a request from the defendants' lawyers. He, however, turned down another request from the advocates to grant bail to the suspects.

Prosecutors appealed against a criminal court ruling acquitting the seven.

The mastermind of the fraud, who is currently on the run, got a five-year sentence in absentia. A warrant was issued for his arrest.

Prosecutors have demanded the toughest penalty be handed down to the six for aiding and abetting the fugitive defendant.

Abu Dhabi police said the suspects had presented forged documents from a European commercial bank purporting that the UAE Central Bank held Dh36 billion in investments belonging to the fugitive mastermind's family.

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