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AFP

US court orders expulsion of Afghan imam

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An Afghanistan-born imam who admitted he lied to the FBI over an aborted terror plot against the New York subway system was freed Thursday but ordered to leave the country within three months, a court official said.

Ahmad Wais Afzali, 39, appeared in Brooklyn federal court where a judge determined that he had already spent enough time in prison after his arrest in September.

"He was sentenced to time served and ordered to self-deport within 90 days," court spokesman Robert Nardoza told AFP.

The imam pleaded guilty in March to making false statements to Federal Bureau of Investigation agents investigating Najibullah Zazi, an Afghan immigrant who has since confessed to conspiring to bomb New York.

According to prosecutors, Afzali telephoned Zazi to warn him that he was being watched. Zazi subsequently abandoned the bomb plot and returned from New York to his home in Colorado.

Afzali, a permanent resident working as an imam at a New York mosque but not a US citizen, made a plea agreement which saw him face a reduced prison sentence of up to six months.

He remained free on bail ahead of the sentencing, but told reporters in March that "I just signed my death sentence" after the plea deal because he was diabetic and that abroad he would not be able to get proper treatment.

Bomb-plotter Zazi pleaded guilty to three charges: conspiracy to use weapons of mass destruction, conspiracy to commit murder in a foreign country and providing material support to the Al-Qaeda Islamist network.

He faces life in prison for the first two charges and 15 years for the third. However, his plea appeared to be part of a bargain in which he could receive more lenient punishment in return for cooperating with investigators.

Sentencing is set for June 25.