

Extortion plot against Australian airline

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SYDNEY, Australia -- Security authorities Sunday urged an extortionist who threatened to attack a commercial Australian airliner with a homemade missile to negotiate his demand for a reported \$1 million.

Police in Brisbane Saturday lifted a news blackout on the extortion plot against Trans Australian Airlines and an attack on a relic Canberra bomber parked at Brisbane's air museum.

A rocket-type projectile was fired into the bomber, causing some damage, but after analysis authorities said the missile was unsophisticated and not capable of shooting down an aircraft.

Following the attack on the Canberra the extortionist apparently demanded the money be paid or he would attack a commercial airliner.

The airline said the extortion plot had not disrupted service and was maintaining normal flight schedules.

The news blackout was lifted after authorities tried to deliver an unspecified amount of money to the extortionist Friday, but the money was never claimed.

The airline had apparently agreed to meet the extortionist's demands, described by Queensland police as 'very professional and to be taken seriously,' the Sydney Sun-Herald said.

The news blackout was imposed because authorities feared coverage could jeopardize negotiations.

The extortionist made his demand and claimed responsibility for the bomber attack in a letter to the airlines Wednesday and later detailed in a tape recording of how the money was to be delivered.

'We are anxious for him to understand that we had problems with a tape recording he sent us which caused delays in meeting the instructions for the ransom delivery,' said Brisbane's Chief Detective Ben Robertson.

Police refused to disclose the amount of the demand, but newspapers and radio said it was \$1 million.

Security forces were placed on full alert throughout Australia and security was stepped up at major airports, officials said.

At a news conference in Canberra, Administrative Services Minister Kevin Newman said no arrests had been made in the case.

He said the extortion plot was being treated as a domestic issue and did not involve any foreign terrorist organizations.