

US EX-COP GUILTY OF RAPING ON DUTY

CONVICTION SYMBOL OF NATIONAL PROBLEM

OKLAHOMA CITY: A former Oklahoma City police officer was found guilty of rape and sexual battery by a jury on Thursday in a case where prosecutors said he preyed on women who had trouble with the law, hoping that their word would not



OKLAHOMA CITY: Daniel Holtzclaw cries as the verdicts are read in his trial on Thursday. —AP

stand up against his. Daniel Holtzclaw, who turned 29 on Thursday, broke down in tears as the verdict was read in the case where he was charged with sexually assaulting and raping 13 women. He was also cleared of about half of the 36 counts against him.

Sentencing was set for January and he could face life in prison. Holtzclaw was led out of the courtroom in handcuffs. The jury has been deliberating since Monday night. Protesters who gathered outside the court earlier this week, demanded that the all-white jury convict the officer based on the physical evidence and the word of the 13 black women, who testified about how they were sexually assaulted.

In closing arguments on Monday, prosecutors said Holtzclaw targeted his victims by going after women he came across while on patrol. He ran background checks and went after those who had outstanding warrants, previous arrests or carried drugs or drug paraphernalia. They said he did this because he did not think authorities would take the victims' word over his if he had to defend himself against sexual assault allegations. The defense said the victims provided testimony that was unreliable and dishonest.

Defense attorney Scott Adams said Holtzclaw was an honorable police officer whose activities were made to appear evil and suspicious. Thirteen women took the stand in the trial, which began more than a month ago, telling jurors of sexual assaults that ranged from touching over their clothing to forced oral sex and rape. Holtzclaw, who did not testify, was fired over the accusations in Jan 2015 after approximately three years on the job. Holtzclaw is mixed race Asian and white. His father - a police officer in Enid, about 100 miles northwest of Oklahoma City - his mother and sister were in the courtroom as the verdict was read. At least one accuser was present, as well as several black community leaders.

Holtzclaw's case brought new attention to the problem of sexual misconduct committed by law enforcement officers, something police chiefs have studied for years. After receiving a report from a grandmother who said Holtzclaw forced her to perform oral sex during a traffic stop, police identified a dozen other women who said Holtzclaw had victimized them. The youngest was the 17-year-old girl. She was the last to testify at Holtzclaw's trial.

The girl recalled Holtzclaw pulling up in his police car as she walked home one night in June 2014. Holtzclaw drove her to her family's home and walked her to the porch, where he told her he had to search her. She said he grabbed her breasts, then pulled down her pink shorts and raped her. She testified that he asked if it was the first time she had ever had sex with a cop. Her DNA was found on his uniform trousers. —Agencies

DIVERS SEARCH LAKE FOR EVIDENCE IN MASSACRE

SAN BERNARDINO, California: A week-old investigation into the shooting rampage that left 14 people dead at a holiday party in Southern California turned on Thursday to a small lake near the scene of the massacre, where divers searched for evidence. The FBI also revealed investigators were looking into any connections there may have been between one of the two killers in San Bernardino last week and four men arrested in 2012 in a separate federal terrorism case brought in nearby Riverside, California.

Thursday's underwater search stemmed from unspecified leads indicating the married couple who carried out the shooting spree had been in the vicinity of Seccombe Lake in San Bernardino on the day of the killings, said David Bowdich, assistant director of the FBI field office in Los Angeles.

Bowdich said he would not discuss the "specific evidence we're looking for."

CNN reported investigators were seeking a computer hard drive that belonged to the couple, who the FBI has said were inspired by Islamic extremists. Bowdich said investigators already have combed the surrounding park, and that the search of the lake by FBI and Sheriff's Department divers could take days.

Seccombe Lake Park lies about 2.5 km north of the Inland Regional Center, the social services agency where 14 people were killed and 22 others injured when Syed Rizwan Farook and his wife, Tashfeen Malik, stormed a holiday gathering of his co-workers there on Dec 2 and opened fire with assault rifles. Farook, 28, a US-born son of Pakistani immigrants, and Malik, 29, a Pakistani native he married last year in Saudi

Arabia, were slain hours after their attack in a shootout with police.

The FBI said it is treating the mass shooting as an act of terrorism, citing the couple's declaration that they were acting on behalf of the militant group Islamic State, as well as a large cache of weapons, ammunition and bomb-making materials seized in the investigation. The couple's motives remain unclear. But if the crime proves to have been the work of killers driven by militant Islamic ideology, as the FBI suspects, it would mark the deadliest such attack on US soil since Sept 11, 2011. The latest slayings and disclosures about the killers' backgrounds have put law US law enforcement on heightened alert and reverberated into the US presidential campaign, intensifying debates over gun control, immigration and national security. —Reuters

News

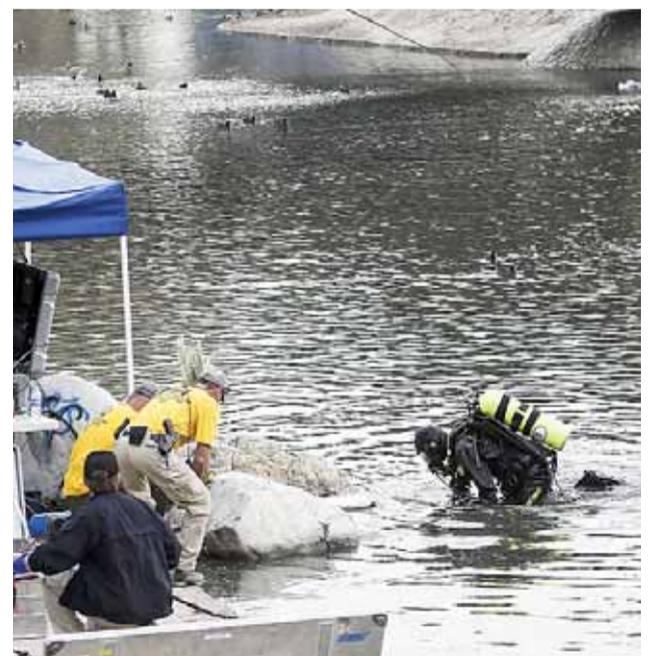
in brief

US Muslim group gets white powder in mail

WASHINGTON: A Muslim advocacy group evacuated its national headquarters on Capitol Hill on Thursday after receiving a letter containing white powder, but staff were later allowed to re-enter after authorities conducted preliminary tests and deemed the substance harmless. The letter received by the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR) also contained a note that read, "Die a painful death, Muslims," according to CAIR staff attorney Maha Sayed. "Our fear is at a pretty high level at this time, given the anti-Muslim rhetoric going on," said Sayed. In California, a CAIR branch office in the Bay Area city of Santa Clara, was also evacuated on Thursday after receiving an envelope with an unknown powder inside, CAIR spokesman Ibrahim Hooper said. About three CAIR employees came into contact with the powder and were quarantined in the building while police and firefighters investigated the scene, said group spokesman Hooper, adding that the rest of the office staff waited outside on the sidewalk. Sayed said on the group's Facebook page that the organization receives hate messages daily.

Hundreds march after Chicago mayor apology

CHICAGO: Hundreds of protesters marched through the streets of Chicago and staged "die-ins" on Thursday, calling for the resignation of embattled Mayor Rahm Emanuel a day after he emotionally apologized for the 2014 police shooting of a 17-year-old black teen. The day's protests started with dozens of medical students of different races lying down in front of City Hall for 16 minutes at the start of the work day, some holding signs reading "Do No Harm" in a demonstration broadcast by local media. The protesters chose 16 minutes to symbolize the 16 times white police officer Jason Van Dyke shot Laquan McDonald in 2014. Another demonstration unfolded during evening rush hour in the city's downtown. About 500 people marched from City Hall to Millennium Park, at times stopping traffic and making sharp, unexpected turns that forced police to scramble to catch up. The march was one of the largest in Chicago since the release of the video. Protesters held signs demanding the resignation of Emanuel and Cook County State Attorney Anita Alvarez and for an overhaul of Chicago's police board. At times, they chanted "16 and a cover-up!"



SAN BERNARDINO, California: An FBI dive team conducts a search for any evidence that may have been left by the husband and wife behind the San Bernardino massacre at Seccombe Lake Park on Thursday. —AFP