

SAUDI FACES \$6BN US LAWSUIT BY SEPT 11 INSURERS

NEW YORK: Saudi Arabia is facing a renewed \$6 billion lawsuit by dozens of insurers seeking to hold it responsible for business and property damage caused by the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks. The lawsuit filed late Thursday in the US District Court in Manhattan is the latest effort to hold Saudi Arabia liable for the attacks. Nearly 3,000 people died when hijacked airplanes crashed into the World Trade Center in New York, the Pentagon near Washington, DC, and a Pennsylvania field.

Insurers, including Liberty Mutual, Safeco, Wausau and many Lloyd's syndicates, accused Saudi Arabia and a state-affiliated charity of providing funding and other material support that enabled Osama bin Laden and Al-Qaeda to conduct the attacks. The Saudi government has long denied involvement. Lawyers for the government and the charity, the Saudi High Commission for Relief of Bosnia & Herzegovina, yesterday declined to comment or could not immediately be reached for comment. Saudi Arabia long had broad immunity from Sept. 11 lawsuits in the United States.

That changed in September, when Congress overrode a veto by former President Barack Obama and adopted the Justice Against Sponsors of Terrorism Act, permitting such lawsuits to proceed.

The insurers said they plan to show that the Sept. 11 attacks were an "act of international terrorism" within the meaning of JASTA. They are seeking more than \$2 billion in compensatory damages, plus triple and punitive damages. At least seven lawsuits were also filed in the Manhattan court on behalf of individuals. These include a lawsuit on Monday by families of about 800 attack victims, as well as 1,500 people injured after responding to the New York attack.

Until last month, the insurers had been appealing a Sept. 2015 dismissal of their case by US District Judge George Daniels in Manhattan, who oversees many Sept 11 lawsuits. But the appeal was vacated after Saudi Arabia, the insurers and other plaintiffs agreed in a joint court filing that JASTA "was intended to apply" to their cases, and that Daniels should review its impact. The case is The Underwriting Members of Lloyd's Syndicate 53 et al v. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia et al, US District Court, Southern District of New York, No. 17-02129. —Reuters

LONDON ATTACK BEARS IS 'SIGNATURE' BUT NO LINK

CAIRO: The "Islamic State soldier" who killed four people in an attack on the British parliament may have been inspired by calls to arms against the West but the militant group has given no evidence yet that he acted on specific instructions.

British-born Muslim convert Khalid Masood mowed down pedestrians in his car and stabbed a policeman to death in a high-profile killing which echoed other deadly attacks in Europe claimed by the ultra-hardline Islamists. Almost 24 hours after the killings the group issued a brief statement calling Masood one of its soldiers. But it offered no details to suggest that Islamic State's leadership - losing ground to enemies in Syria and Iraq - knew of his plans in advance.

That in itself does not rule out coordination between Masood and militants in the shrinking, self-styled caliphate. Islamic State frequently delays releasing video footage or other material showing the planning and implementation of operations.

But the nature of Wednesday's killings, carried out by a single assailant armed only with a hire car and a knife, matched a pattern of recent attacks which require no training, military expertise or outside guidance. Islamic State spokesman Abu Mohammed Al Adnani called on sympathisers across the world to carry out exactly those kind of attacks in an appeal issued when the group was at the peak of its power in late 2014. "If you can kill a disbelieving American or European ... smash his head with a rock, or slaughter him with a knife, or run him over with your car, or throw him down from a high place, or choke him, or poison him," said Adnani, who was killed in a US air strike in Syria last August.

British counter-terrorism police say they are still trying to establish whether Masood, a criminal with militant links, acted alone, with support or under instruction of others. — Reuters



MOSUL: Displaced Iraqis from Mosul walk towards refugee camps yesterday after fleeing their city during the government forces ongoing offensive to retake the city from Islamic State (IS) group fighters. —AFP

IS GUNMEN TARGET CIVILIANS FLEEING MOSUL BY NIGHT

FLOW PICKS UP AS CONDITIONS GROW MORE DESPERATE

MOSUL: Islamic State gunmen are opening fire on men, women and children as they try to flee Mosul under cover of darkness, civilians who escaped the besieged Iraqi city said yesterday.

Hungry and exhausted, thousands sloshed through the mud, past wrecked buildings and shattered pavements, to reach an army checkpoint. Some carried suitcases or bags, others had fled with just the clothes on their backs. They came by foot or piled into carts, and some pushed relatives in wheelchairs.

A black-uniformed intelligence officer said about 6,000 people had come through on Thursday, the most he had seen at this exit, and a similar flow had poured in yesterday since about 4 am. Relieved to reach the safety of the checkpoint, some of those escaping described running a gauntlet of fire.

"The snipers are professional, they do not care. Anybody that moves, they kill," said Faris Khader, from Al-Abar district. The battle for Mosul, Islamic State's last major urban stronghold in Iraq, has now lasted more than five months. Government forces recaptured the east side in January and are besieging the militants on the western side of the Tigris river. At least 500,000 civilians are trapped inside, battered by government and US-led air strikes and artillery, caught in the crossfire of ground fighting, or targeted by IS gunmen. The militants sometimes use residents as human shields.

Khader blamed the government and international coalition for some of the death and mayhem. An IS sniper had

been firing from the roof of his home when an air strike hit, he said.

"There are many people dead under the rubble. Some in my family died. Nobody can take the bodies out. They were killed by an air strike."

'No food, no water'

Omar, a car mechanic, described life under IS. "It's very difficult. There's no food, no water. They are killing a lot of people. They kill anyone who goes out, they kill them in the street.

"We have no money. We have suffered for three years," he said, clutching his young son to his shoulder. Salwan, 19, pushed his sister Noor, 21, who is paralyzed and deaf, for more than two hours in her wheelchair to reach safety after their house was blown up. They were shot at during the trek, he said. Sweat poured from the face of Khaled Khalil as he trudged up the last stretch of the debris-strewn boulevard with his young son slung on his shoulder and his wife and three other children behind. He had no coat, no bag, and just a pair of plastic sandals on his mud-spattered feet. "I came like this. We had the chance so we fled," said the 36-year-old. "We have been travelling since yesterday. We are very tired but now we are safe."

He was a carpenter but his shop had been destroyed.

Taking the risk

Then an army jeep drove up with a wounded man on a stretcher. He was laid on the ground by an abandoned building. Bashar Hazem, 43, and Ali, 29,

had carried out their brother Maan, 32, overnight. He was shot in the right thigh 20 days ago. He was bandaged up in the Jamhori hospital inside an IS-held area but left for home after three days because it was dangerous. He had no painkillers and grimaced as his brothers spoke. "We had no food. That's why we decided to risk escaping," Bashar said.

They made a run with a big group in the early hours of yesterday. But IS gunmen starting shooting at them and the group was split up. They saw three women shot in the legs. "Even if you are injured, they shoot at you. Our family is still inside but they are coming soon, God willing," Ali said.

At the checkpoint, soldiers separated the women and children from the men. They waited, tired but visibly relieved, for buses to take them to a United Nations reception camp at Hamman Al-Alil about 20 km (15 miles) away. The men were gathered in a park, sitting on the ground under guard by soldiers and awaiting questioning.

"We do a first check here. Anyone we suspect of working with Daesh (IS), we pull to one side," the intelligence officer said. Some IS fighters had tried to leave disguised as women, their faces concealed by veils, he said, scrutinizing arrivals. The men were then loaded onto trucks and taken to a centre for more thorough checks. An avuncular Sergeant Hussam Imad told jokes to a group of women and children waiting to be transported to the reception camp. They boarded the bus with smiles on their faces. — Reuters